WORLD'S-END

AMÉLIE RIVES
(PRINCESS TROUBETZKOY)

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"WHAT WAS ONE TO DO WITH A BIG, SATANIC CROW THAT SPOILED ONE'S DAY DREAMS?"—*Page 60*

WORLD'S END

BY

AMÉLIE RIVES
(PRINCESS TROUBETZKOY)

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THE QUICK OR THE DEAD, Etc.

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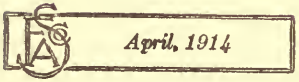

TO
MY FRIEND
DR. FREDERICK PETERSON
WITH GRATEFUL
AFFECTION

WORLD'S - END

I

OWEN RANDOLPH and his nephew, Richard Bryce, came out of the Ritz-Carlton together and got into Randolph's motor-car.

It was January. Through scudding drift stole a small, sad, tarnished, wondering moon, ineffectual against the insolent, lilac-white glare of the arc-lamps.

The car crossed Fifty-ninth Street, and the brazen horse of the Sherman Statue, with its angel groom, seemed to leap at them. A few moments more brought them to the door of the house on Fifth Avenue, where, after some tableaux, Auguste was to dance that night.

A footman in powder and knee-breeches sauntered up and helped them off with their overcoats in the semi-professional, semi-negligent manner of one rehearsing a domestic's part in private theatricals.

As they entered the ballroom the curtains were about to be drawn aside from a small stage. In the dull light they could see the blonde blur of women's arms and shoulders among the dark mass of the men's black-coated backs, and an occasional gleam from one of the gilded chairs. The atmosphere seemed close and murky after the thin rigour of the outside air.

Richard slipped into an empty chair, but Randolph remained standing. He was such a big man that to fold himself up in a small space for any length of time caused him acute discomfort.

A youth who was on the stage before the curtains now made some witty remarks, well peppered with indiscreet personalities, at which there was a little flurry of appreciative laughter.

The tableau that followed was startling. In front of a large cage sat a lovely girl in Oriental costume. Within

the cage a monstrous figure suddenly upreared itself—a huge man clad in shaggy hide to represent an ape. A movable jaw with great fangs and a cushion of red tongue were adjusted to his face.

Thrusting out one arm, he caught at the young woman's veil. She eluded him and began a slow dance of allurement. Suddenly, from some portion of her gauzy dress, she drew forth a slice of raw meat and gave it to the monster. He took it, tested it between his fangs, threw it down, and, breaking the bars of his cage, rushed at the tantalising houri. Lightly casting her long chain of pearls about his neck, she led him from the scene. A rustle of whispers ended the applause. People were evidently at a loss as to the meaning of this symbolic drama.

The next tableau consisted of a big canvas on which was painted a spirited chestnut filly with up-flung heels. Where a horse's head should have been there looked out the beautiful, mischievous face of the loveliest woman in New York. As if just smitten by the heels of the Centauress, a little Satyr, in evening-dress, rolled helpless, its head supplied by that of a well-known man.

"Why don't you look where you're going?" said the Centauress.

"Alas! that's why I'm here," replied the Satyr.

A gale of laughter and bravos greeted them; then the curtains fell for the last time, the lights were turned on, and the servants began to clear the room for dancing.

As the lights went up, Randolph saw all about him the people that he had known for many years, but had not seen often during the past three or four. He glanced quickly from woman to woman, thinking how little they had changed, and how the saying that American beauties wither early was a mistaken one.

A little, fair, paunchy, mild-faced man, the husband of one of these beauties, hailed him suddenly as "old chap" and remarked that Randolph reminded him of an African explorer . . . he was so very sunburnt and looked so aloof somehow. Randolph replied to this with some banality, and then all at once the little man began to tell him about his pet bullfinch. He said that the capacity of bullfinches for affection was immense, and that his pet was in the habit of alighting on his head in the morning and, pressing down its little wings on either side of his forehead in a sort of embrace, bursting into song.

Randolph looked at the little man while he told this anecdote, and liked him for it. The lack of self-consciousness that could allow a man to paint himself in so absurd a guise struck him as simple and appealing. Then, just as he was about to reply, the bullfinch's master slid into an anecdote filthy and silly.

Randolph turned away, saying that he must go and speak to his sister, and the vision pursued him all the evening of a round-bellied, sentimental-eyed little man, with a bullfinch perched upon the crown of his bald head, pouring forth its innocent roulades, while a stream of salacious inanities issued from the human mouth below.

Mrs. Bryce was standing near one of the doors, talking to a young man, who turned away as Randolph approached. She was a very thin woman, but beautifully made, tall and dark, like her brother. The most striking feature in her face was her black, narrow eyebrows, which lifted with an effect of fretfulness as they neared the nose. Her mouth was at the same time querulous and restrained, as though she had a slight grievance against life which she preferred not to mention, but the lips were prettily shaped, and touched this evening with carmine, Randolph noticed. He thought it hardened her, but it was undoubtedly becoming. She had the merest wing-brush of grey at either temple, although she was now fifty-one.

As Sally Randolph she had been one of the beauties of Virginia, and as Mrs. Peter Bryce she had continued her triumphant career in New York until poor Peter's losses broke up their social life.

Randolph's generosity had kept them from anything like poverty, but of course the house on Fifth Avenue and the place in Newport had to go . . . though in her heart Sally had felt that Owen would have indulged her in keeping these also. At this point, however, Peter had grown obstinate, and his "No" was not to be melted, shattered, or put aside. Nine years ago poor Peter had died in the effort of making a second fortune, and his wife was left with an income of only two thousand a year. Since then she had lived part of the time at "World's-End," her brother's estate in Virginia, and part in the charming flat he had furnished for her in New York. A year after his father's death her son Richard had gone to Paris in quest of art, and it was now three months since his return. Randolph also had been absent from both New York and Vir-

ginia for several months, in the study of educational questions which he thought might help him with the people at "World's-End"; and was but just returned from a visit to Miss Berry's Schools in Georgia. It was with the view of also studying Richard as veneered by France that he had asked him to dine at the Ritz-Carlton that evening.

Richard was Mrs. Bryce's only child, and one of her suppressed grievances against life was the constant torment afforded her by the idea that his Tolstoian sympathies might so gain upon her brother as to induce him to divide his great riches among the poor and leave Richard with only a few paltry thousands. It had been long understood among the three that Richard was to be his uncle's heir, in case that Randolph did not marry.

Mrs. Bryce, knowing her brother in some ways very well, considered that as he had reached the age of forty-seven without marrying he could be safely regarded as a fixed bachelor.

Yet as she looked at him now she wondered anew, as she often did, how this had happened, for there was nothing ascetic or monkish about Owen—on the contrary, his hazel eyes and deeply cut mouth were full of humour and temperament.

"Do you find Richard much changed?" she asked abruptly.

Randolph returned her concentrated gaze with the flicker of a smile.

"He'll be 'worse before he's better,' Sally . . . as Hannah used to tell me."

"How do you mean?" demanded his sister with a nervous twitch of her petulant eyebrows. "Do you think that Paris has . . . *harmed* him?"

"Why, no, Sally . . . don't be a goose. Paris has no special brew for poisoning a youth. If he wants poison he can find it here in New York just as well as in Paris. I mean that he's got—I find myself quoting Hannah again—'notions in his head.' "

"I wish you wouldn't keep me on tenter-hooks like this," said Mrs. Bryce peevishly. "I wish you'd say what you've got to say about my boy quite plainly, Owen. In a second or two somebody is sure to interrupt us."

Randolph could not resist teasing her.

"There's very good stuff in the lad indeed," said he,

"but at present there's too much embroidery for the material."

His sister looked at him with real anger and he repented of his frivolity.

"In other words . . . in the plain language I asked you to speak . . . you mean that you consider Richard a pretentious noodle," she remarked, before he could utter the sentence that he was hastening to frame.

"Dear Sally, I meant nothing of the sort," he said, holding her with his kind eyes. "Don't be cross. It would be a fine thing for us to quarrel over Richard of all people. The boy has talent. I suppose you don't really want me to tell you that he is Michael Angelo and Shakespeare in one?"

"I'm not aware that I've ever given you reason to think that I considered Richard the reincarnation of those two worthies," observed Mrs. Bryce with a stiffness so like Richard's on such occasions that Randolph with difficulty suppressed a smile. "He has never been really congenial to you," she added bitterly, noticing the abnormal seriousness of his expression caused by the effort to keep from smiling, and realising with her quick hyper-sensitiveness exactly what originated it.

"My dear girl," exclaimed Randolph, "this must really stop. It would be too foolish of us to get at cross-purposes over Richard. I'm fond of him, as you know. What real congeniality there can be between a boy of twenty-six who looks upon the Universe as a vast studio and a man of forty-seven who regards it as a confoundedly trying school I leave it to your own wits to divine. Richard is at an age when his enthusiasms give him keener delight than they do his fellows—his middle-aged fellows, at least—that is all."

Mrs. Bryce turned this over for a second or two.

"Have you made out what it is exactly that he wishes to do?" she asked at length.

"I believe he intends to reform the art and morals of America," he replied demurely. "At least, 'reform' is the word that he would use. I doubt whether even you, my dear Sally, would agree with him as to its appositeness."

Mrs. Bryce knit her brows at him. He saw the symbolical chip upon her shoulder.

"Why do you say 'even me'?" she demanded sharply.

"Because, however ardently, as a devoted mother, you

might long to agree with your son,—as an avowed supporter of the existing social order, you would be bound as vehemently to differ from him."

"What dreadful things has that boy been saying now?" asked his mother with simple anxiety.

"Oh, just a few passing whacks at marriage and religion. They seem to him inartistic," said Randolph, laughing. "Come, Sally . . . don't look so tragic. You aren't going to take all this froth of youth for the brew underneath, are you?"

He saw in her eyes a real dread.

"Owen . . . he has always talked like that. It isn't only froth. The dregs are in it." Then she caught herself up. "He thinks it's clever," she said. "He likes to startle us."

Her brother just touched her hand as they stood together near the door.

"Well . . . don't take it too seriously," he said, and she gave him a warm, deep glance, as fleeting as his touch had been, but which told him more plainly than words could have done how sincere was her affection for him, despite her wayward, testy temper.

Then, as she had foreseen, they were interrupted and, leaving her with a knot of friends, Randolph went across to speak with the mauve-eyed English lady who had played the Centauress in the tableau, and who was signalling to him. On his way through the crowded room he caught a bit of innocuous gossip that pleased his sense of fun. A woman was saying to another:

"My dear! You've been too long away! Don't you know that Lola Sibley has just had a baby?"

"Is she pleased?"

"Of course. And now they're going to Egypt and taking Tootie with them."

"Who is Tootie? The baby?"

"No—the fox-terrier. The baby is to stay with its grandmother."

Randolph was smiling so pleasedly over these remarks when he reached Mrs. Beresford (such was the mauve-eyed lady's name) that she said, "You've heard some delicious stupidity. I know that particular expression of yours so well. What was it?"

"Just about Tootie's going to Egypt and the baby stopping with its grandmother."

"Oh, yes! Hadn't you heard that before? It's been to and fro over New York for days, like the dove over the waters. Poor dears! I believe the baby rather scares them. But don't let's talk of Lola Sibley," she went on. "It's so nice to have you with us again. When are you going back to Virginia? You do love that old place of yours dreadfully, don't you? It's so very nice and so odd, too, to see an American so fond of a place. But I suppose you call yourself a Virginian—eh?"

"A Virginian first, perhaps," admitted Randolph, smiling. "It's in the blood, you know."

"Yes, I know . . . 'John Randolph of Roanoke' and all that."

Randolph laughed out this time.

"I'm afraid that ancestral personage was a bit of a scalawag," said he.

"Ancestral personages generally are," said Mrs. Beresford.

"Then it's fortunate that I'm not going to be one, isn't it?" returned Randolph, who enjoyed this light chaffing after his months of conscientious grind.

Mrs. Beresford's match-making instinct was alert in an instant.

"Aren't you really ever going to marry?" asked she with true British frankness. "It's no end of a shame. I know a perfect darling of a girl for you. She's in this very room."

"Now. . . . Now . . ." said Randolph warningly. "Do you want me to rush off for safety to 'World's-End' the first evening that I have seen you in a year?"

Mrs. Beresford narrowed her white lids slightly and looked at him as sternly as eyes that resembled periwinkle-flowers could look.

"You may joke," said she, "but I think it's shameful of you not to marry."

Randolph begged to know why in the world she thought it "shameful."

"Because you are depriving some woman of such a duck of a husband," retorted she, and they both laughed.

But the next moment she became serious again. "Apart from joking," she said, "you really ought to have a son to inherit your fortune and that Virginia estate you love so much."

"And poor Richard . . . why should his nose be put out

of joint at such inconvenience to me? Don't you like Richard?"

"Yes. I do. I more than like him. I think he's wonderful. I think he's a genius. But a genius ought to make his own fortune."

"Geniuses aren't famous for making fortunes," said Randolph gravely. "But, tell me, why do you think Richard a genius?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Beresford, "it's his wonderful talk—for one thing. He's the most brilliant talker I ever heard. He's too young, you know, to have done anything much yet awhile. But what I have seen of his work I think extraordinary—so utterly original. Surely you think it original?"

"I haven't seen it yet. I'm going to his studio tomorrow afternoon."

"How nice! So am I. I'm really very keen to know what you'll think of his work. Haven't you read any of his latest poems?"

"Not yet," said Randolph. "Have you?"

"No—but he has read some of them to me. They are *most* original! He has discovered a new rhythm or beat or something of the kind in verse. It's a little beyond me—I'm not literary, you know—but the effect is wonderful."

Randolph said that this reminded him of a Latinist of his acquaintance who had discovered a new method of scansion which allowed one to read Cæsar's Commentaries as rhythmically as though they were the Georgics of Virgil.

Mrs. Beresford gave him a shrewd glance and said:

"I believe you are 'poking fun' at me, but all the same Richard's verses are remarkable. They're so soaked with colour. You seem to see it waving up in spirals from the pages as he reads. And he's so charming to look at. Just watch him as he stands there talking to that girl in lavender. You feel somehow that a man who looks like that must do original work. The very way he dresses is a bit of perfect art."

Randolph looked at his nephew's young, thin silhouette, seen partly against the lavender frock and partly against the white-and-gold panelling of the wall, and was pleasantly struck by its distinction. The high, black-satin stock of the "thirties," and the reticent, suave cut of the evening coat with its black-velvet lapels, suited admirably the lank young figure and long, ivory-toned face. The small, neatly

shaped skull, however, struck him as being too much developed in front, and too little in the back. Richard moved his hands a great deal when he talked,—long, leaf-like hands that seemed as light as paper from this distance.

Randolph, who believed that a man's outward appearance often corresponds with his artistic work, thought that there would probably be a good deal of self-conscious artifice in Richard's writings—"*Chinoiserie,*" he called it to himself.

A rustle of expectation stirred the room.

"Ah—it's Auguste coming. Have you seen him dance?"

"Not yet."

"Neither have I. But I'm dying to. Richard says that his dancing is the harmonic of rhythmic violence to which life is set."

"Richard takes delightful liberties with words," said Randolph, amused. "The harmonic, as well as I remember, is the secondary or overtone. Now, I should have thought that Richard meant to say that . . ."

Here Auguste and his mate in dancing wafted into the room on a light wind of music, and Randolph did not finish his sentence.

II

RANDOLPH watched the dancers at first rather than the dance.

" 'My country 'tis of thee . . .' " he reflected. "Where else in this broad world would mothers bring their young daughters to see Auguste dance?"

Auguste had a good-natured, impudent face, with round nostrils and round, dark blue eyes, bland with a serene effrontery. He was of medium height, well-knit and agile with the grace that is expressive of a springlike strength beneath. He held his partner to him by a hand spread flat between her shoulders,—the gesture of a feline that has put his sheathed paw lightly on some object, yet means to hold by its claws if necessary.

The girl was of an exquisite vulgarity—a slim, rounded bit of femininity whose very bones seemed pliant. Her small, wedge-shaped face with its blackened eyes and crimsoned lips looked sickly under its wings of cropped hair, dyed straw-colour.

Auguste was in ordinary evening dress for this first dance, and the girl wore a short slip of thin, very clinging stuff over fleshings.

At first they spun so fleetly and evenly over the sleek floor that he was reminded of the motion of "sleeping" tops—then the dance grew more measured, more accented, and gradually passed into the most intricate maze of sensual patterns, with those two human bodies weaving the web of desire as on an invisible loom. . . .

Randolph withdrew his look from them and bent it on the spectators. In moments of climax the audience often interested him more than the drama, and this interest was keener than usual at the present moment.

With what expression would all these young women and girls of his own world be watching those gyrating aliens from another?

The faces were fixed, but mostly expressionless; they were absorbed, but he could see no other emotion upon them than that of a perfectly frank and unrelaxing curiosity. He glanced at a group of men clustered in a big doorway. With them it was different. Mouths were parted—eyes glistening. They too were obsessed by curiosity, but of another relish. Yet these were the fathers, brothers and sweethearts of the women in the little gilded chairs.

The dance ceased and there was great applause.

"I must say, it's . . . *frank*," said Mrs. Beresford.

"Yes—you couldn't call it subtle, certainly," admitted Randolph.

"Of course it's rather horrid, but it *is* beautiful in a way."

"Certainly it is," he agreed.

She glanced back over her shoulder at the chairs behind them.

"It does seem odd to have young girls here, doesn't it? I suppose that's modernity."

"Let's call it modernity," said Randolph.

"It displeases you, doesn't it?"

"Why should it displease me? I haven't a daughter here, and Sally is of mature age. You can't be thinking that my own morals are in danger?"

"Well . . ." said Mrs. Beresford ruminatingly—"I believe I feel just as you do."

"Please . . . how do I feel?"

"You don't like all these young girls looking on."

"It seems an odd situation to me, I confess. But I've watched them carefully, and, do you know, I don't think it affects them one way or the other?"

"No . . ." she said, gazing about her again. "I don't think it does. Why do you suppose that is?"

"Ah . . ." said Randolph, and he gave a whimsical imitation of an elaborate Gallic shrug.

As another man came to speak to Mrs. Beresford at this moment he made over his chair to him and, turning away, found himself beside a portrait painter named Buxton whom he rather liked.

"What do you think of it?" asked Buxton when they had shaken hands. "Rather steep for a drawing-room fad —hey?"

"It's amazing," said Randolph.

"Which? The dance or the audience?" asked the other, grinning.

"The combination. It's perfectly incredible. What do you make of it?"

"Give it up," said Buxton. "But what do *they* make of it? . . . That's the interesting question. They aren't blind . . . they aren't fools . . . they aren't sucklings . . . they aren't sexless. Yet they stare at that unspeakable performance like hair-dressers' busts at the crowd."

Richard here approached and, addressing his uncle with an annoyed air, said that he was sorry to have led him to expect so much from Auguste's dancing—that already America had injured Auguste as an artist—that his dancing had become lukewarm and banal and had lost its marvellous violence and savage *élan*.

"You'll doubtless regard me as old-fashioned, Richard, —*un bourgeois en délire*,—when I tell you that I consider him sufficiently indecent since he dances before young girls. But look at them! As calm as though they had been a-Maying!"

Richard gazed at the untroubled maidens from under his straight, black brows, so like his mother's. Then he looked again at his uncle.

"Have you guessed their secret?" asked he.

"No," said Randolph, frowning a little.

"Then I will tell you, Uncle Owen—for I know what is at the core of their hearts. They adored it—for all women adore brutality. But they've been brought up to conceal things, and so they're concealing it; just as a woman might

draw on a white glove to hide the bruise of a lover's violent kiss on her arm."

Randolph looked at him bleakly. He would very much have enjoyed giving Richard a sound cuff. Sally's bitter speech—"He has never been really congenial to you,"—shot into his mind, and he recalled how from boyhood certain traits in Richard had always jarred upon him, remembering at the same time that whenever he had overcome the first instinctive recoil from a personality his after-experience had proved his intuition to be right. How differently he had looked on life when he was Richard's age!—Women had seemed to him like mysterious flowers, at whose touch all the portals of beatitude would fly open. The thought of violence in connection with a woman would have seemed to him a stupid profanity then as now.

And in a sudden flash—he saw the scene empty of himself and Richard reigning at World's-End—Richard with his decadent, Montmartre-ish ideas, ruling over the negroes and white country folk whose problems he had spent so many years trying to solve in a sane, human, fellow-kindly fashion. After all,—if he had a son—— The old, ineradicable human instinct startled him with the suddenness of its attack. Yes—there was no shirking it—he would have preferred to imagine his own son at "World's-End" rather than the son of his sister. Or, no,—he corrected himself, —rather than the individual being, Richard Bryce.

Richard, in the meantime, perceiving quite clearly that his uncle's attitude was antagonistic to his interpretation of the reason for the virginal serenity of the young girls in face of Auguste's dancing, thought what a pity it was that a really able man like Uncle Owen should cherish those antiquated ideas of chivalry which left so many American women moping on pedestals and so many American men moiling below them. In his darksome young creed the maidens went very willingly to the Minotaur and the Sabine women had only shrieked from *savoir faire*.

"Ah . . . Auguste is going to give us the 'Apache' at last," he exclaimed suddenly, and he and Randolph worked their way along the edge of the throng in order to be a little nearer to the dancers.

Auguste, in rough dress, with a vulgar little cap shading his rapacious, questing eyes and a brutal red neckerchief about his throat, had taken on the dignity that always lurks in latent ferocity. His mate, in her black calico

gown and shock of bleached hair, chopped off as for the guillotine and falling over a red neckerchief like his own, was no longer the pert little street-decoy of the fleshings and revealing slip, but a tranced, piteous victim of sex, drawn to the devouring male like a seabird to the glare of the pharos that means its death.

The dance begins. It is a dance of satiety on his part, of not to be rebuffed, utterly debased pleading on hers. He is the carnivore whose lip-bristles are stiff with blood, who has eaten of sweet white meat till he wishes to rend and grind what he can no longer swallow. She is the blood that cries from the ground where it is spilt to be spilt again,—the degraded flesh that does not feel itself alive until the fangs of the devourer are in it.

To pulse-beats of music, inane as the gabbling of idiots, the two circle and turn, facing each other, and ever she shamelessly and wofully solicits, and ever the glutted male flings her off, as though the very reek of her anxious femininity roused in him a fierce hatred of reaction. Once, with an orgasm of pent rage, he cuffs her right and left, on her whitened jaws, as the tiger cuffs his mate grown too familiar. But now he catches her to him, and the brutal bound with which he does so is like a roar of exasperation. He bends her backward, sideward, as though he would break her fragile bones and hear them grit together in the warm pulp of her flesh—then flings her from him like a little doll of rags. Back she goes, and back and back, until her cropped poll rests upon the boards and her slight body is an arch of quivering and repulsed desire from head to heels. Her black skirts spread withered about her. She is like a dark, soiled flower picked from the gutter and cast back again,—a poor "*fleur du mal*" dashed back upon the pavement from between the crevices of which it sprang.

When she trembles up,—crouches, fawns, solicits,—he pounces—this time he has her by the wrists. Up she goes, up and up. He whirls her round his head like a living sling—a sling of flesh in which the heart is the stone to be slung forth. Round and round he whirls her. What will the end be? Will he hurl her out above the prettily dressed women in the little gilded chairs, to fall among them, crushing them with her actual body, as the symbolic body of her sisterhood should crush their placid self-satisfaction? But no,—he drops her finally back within his own

claws;—spinning ever faster and faster, ever closer and closer he holds her, until blended into one shape, like a madly whirling, Aphroditic toy, they dart from the room, and the "Apache" dance is over.

The culmination of the evening came for Randolph, however, when the maidens on whose account he had been so concerned rose from their places in response to the invitation of the young men, and with smiling good-will began to imitate with their partners the sinuosities of the modern variation of the *"valse chaloupé"* which Auguste had first given.

He noted two Frenchmen whose remarks he had overheard earlier in the evening watching the dancers and busily engaged in a rapid exchange of undertones, and he purposely avoided passing near them, not caring to hear what they might have to say just then about the customs of his country.

As he neared the door, for he had decided not to wait for Richard and Sally, a mother accosted her daughter in quite audible tones.

"Maudie dear, I wouldn't dance any more with Teddy Dering if I were you. He's had entirely too much champagne. And mind you avoid young Miller. He's a nice boy, but you know he's always tight about this time in the evening."

Randolph handed his ticket to the condescending footman, and, recovering his great-coat, stepped out into the thin, stinging air in a mood of mingled relief, wonderment, annoyance, and melancholy.

On the afternoon of the next day Richard was at work in his studio. As his long, nervous, too finely chiselled hands indicated, he was an ardent lover of detail for its own sake. Form as expressed by line was what most appealed to him, and he had exotic ideas about colour, which he said should be mentally suggested rather than presented to the eye in crude masses.

Jewels he called the bourgeoiseries of nature, and considered alabaster and black marble the only precious stones.

In accordance with this theory, his studio was entirely in black and white.

His gift as a draughtsman was undoubtedly rare. The fluent, vibrant beauty of his line swept out along the white surface like black gossamer on the wind of imagination.

But he also considered himself a poet, a painter and a sculptor.

When an admiring lady had once asked him to what school of philosophy he belonged, he had replied that he was "an ideopraxist." The lady had looked up the word in the dictionary as soon as she got home and found that it meant "one who is impelled to act by the force of an idea; who devotes his energies to the carrying out of an idea." She discovered later that this idea by whose force Richard was impelled, and to the carrying out of which his energies were devoted, was the idea of the revelation of the natural bent of a man as disclosed by his art, regardless of all accepted standards of morality and beauty, and of all promptings of the so-called higher self (I quote Richard) which was merely the grafting by civilisation of a banal and morbid sensibility upon the primal and vigorously a-moral senses of the natural man.

As often happens, Richard was of a colder nature than his theories. He experimented with his senses rather than they with him as in the case of the average youth of six-and-twenty, and had he taken a bride he would surely have ground her into paint.

He was working at present on a volume of his own poems which he was illustrating, and it was to hear his latest poem, which he called "The Daughter of Ypocras," that some people were coming that day—Sylvia Beresford, the lovely Mrs. Pierce-Hull, and his mother, who had asked to bring Mary Talliaferro.

Richard frowned now as he recalled Mary's light grey, Irish eyes with the short black lashes and little dance in them—for, whether she spoke or was silent, Mary always seemed to be making light of his most cherished ideas.

When Randolph arrived at the studio he found there Sylvia Beresford, Mrs. Pierce-Hull, and two artists, a Mr. Hines and a Mr. Prosser.

Mrs. Pierce-Hull, of whom Richard had spoken as being uniquely exquisite, was a tall, incredibly thin woman with a white, mask-like face and a Pierrot mouth painted violet-red. From mists of greenish ashen hair her gold green eyes gazed out with the still detachment of a cat's.

Randolph learned from this lady that Mr. Hines was a disciple of Matisse but that Mr. Prosser was a law unto himself and had just finished a most amazing decoration of zebras for Mrs. Pierce-Hull's dining-room.

"It's simply marvellous," she said, "to see what Mr. Prosser has done with zebras after George Moore's saying that zebras and Swiss châlets cannot be used in art. You should see them for yourself, Mr. Randolph—one can't describe them."

Just here Sally came in with Mary Talliaferro and, before reading his poem, Richard was persuaded to show them his last piece of seulpture, a bas-relief in alabaster set upon black marble and entitled "Woman." The black marble, showing dully through the semi-diaphanous alabaster, symbolised, in Richard's view, "the darkness of masculinity lowering through the lighter substance of femininity." To Randolph it seemed disagreeably reminiscent of certain cheap effects in cameos. The face itself, contorted and perverse, certainly did not represent his idea of "Woman." He awaited with curiosity the verdict of the others.

There was silence for some moments after Richard had withdrawn the scarf of black gauze with which the bas-relief was veiled. Then Mrs. Pierce-Hull drew a long breath and said:

"You have disclosed the secrets that women have been keeping these thousands of years."

Sylvia said: "It's *amazing* . . . it's . . . it's *terrifyingly* true."

The disciple of Matisse said in his deep, rough voice: "*Ça y est, et en plein,*" and Prosser exclaimed: "My dear Bryce, what a bi-sexual brain you must have to do a bit of revelation like that."

Mary and Sally were discreetly quiet. Randolph confessed frankly that he did not "understand." The two artists and Mrs. Pierce-Hull spent the next twenty minutes in trying to enlighten him. Finally Richard broke forth into a monologue on the hidden ways of art.

Randolph was diverted and annoyed at the same time by the caracolings of Richard's high-horse, and wondered whether he would ever dismount and pursue the one real gift that he had on the sober feet of common sense. But no, it seemed as if he would choose to reign as Prince of Smatterers over a court that gazed enchanted through the magnifying glass of many-coloured words which he held before his artistic personality,—for now he was telling them that the only real tonic-scale was that of the Chinese, and

of how he was engaged in writing a one-act opera in accordance with the Chinese laws of music.

At last, standing beside the lectern of ebony and ivory, on which lay his book of poems, he began to expound it to them.

The daughter of Ypocras was, he told them, a lovely girl who had been changed into a dragon and doomed to retain this fearful shape until some lover, knowing of her plight, should be bold enough to kiss her on the mouth. In his poem the lover comes and, being often mirrored in the beautiful eyes which are all that remain to her of her woman's form, is drawn gradually into doting on the rare sinuosities of her dragon-shape, and the play of light along her scales of gold and violet. So that, when at last his kiss transforms her again to woman, his artist-heart breaks at the loss of his exquisite dragon, and he sinks dying at the feet of the sweetly normal maiden who has taken her place.

In this poem, he explained, he had endeavoured to reveal some of the dark yet radiant magic that lurks in the mysterious perversities of femininity, as opposed to the commonplace attraction of what he might call the daylight charm of the uncomplex woman.

When he began to read, the still, feline eyes of Mrs. Pierce-Hull never left his face, her pupils seeming to expand and contract with the cadence of the verse, like those of a cat following the uneven flight of a young bird. Sylvia's face was rigid with attention, Sally's anxious. Only in Mary's light grey eyes the little dance seemed going to a merry tune of the mind. Randolph continued to watch Mary with great pleasure. Hers was certainly the charm of daylight, and he thought how crisp and awakening was the contrast of her vivid, humourful face to the almost drugged-looking hothouse beauty of Mrs. Pierce-Hull. Yes, in this atelier of Richard's with its rapt devotees, Mary was like a fine rousing major-chord struck full across the dreamy minor meanderings of a chanson by De Bussy. He would get her to come and have tea with him somewhere after it was over, and they could talk together, in happy and undisturbed philistinism, of World's-End and some of the daylight things that Richard scorned. One was always happy with Mary. That warm heart of hers, saved from sentimentalism by her keen sense of fun, flowed out so to the interests of others as to make them seem doubly

interesting to the others themselves. And suddenly Randolph wondered why it was that he had never fallen in love with Mary,—she was so pre-eminently lovable and so charming to look at with her light-grey happy eyes, her too-short upper lip that always let through a gleam of her pretty teeth, her dark hair curling free from the heaviest pins, and the soft red in her olive cheeks. She was the right age for him, too, just thirty-six, and liked the things that he liked and loved World's-End almost as much as he did—a strong bond. But in all the years that he had known her it had never once crossed his mind to "fall in love" with her—though there was no one for whom he had a stronger affection. And now, all at once, like that, he found it strange that he had never done so,—and wondered why it was exactly, and whether she could ever have loved him if he had cared in that way.

Just here Mary looked at him as though she had felt the touch of his thoughts, and the little dance in her eyes quickened until it became like the dance of light on water, and she made the slightest motion with her lips which told him better than words could have done exactly what she thought of the Daughter of Ypocras, and Richard's sarcophagus-like studio and Mrs. Pierce-Hull, and the painter of zebras, and everything. Yes, he and Mary were so much in sympathy that they could often communicate in this manner without words,—and it seemed stranger than ever to him that he had never "fallen in love" with her.

It was stranger even than he thought, for in these things there is often an unadmitted hypnotic force which emanates from the apparently passive, and Mary had loved him all her life.

III

"TAXI or hansom?" asked Randolph when at last he and Mary were in the street together.

"Oh, a hansom by all means," said Mary, "I can never get too near to a horse, as you know, and besides they're so nice and old-time-y and don't smell of gasolene—only please pick out a good horse."

They let three "Pirates" who were "cruising" the Avenue rather mournfully go by, and then Randolph lifted his stick at a cab drawn by a cocky little bay.

"I wish I had some sugar," sighed Mary as she got in, and the horse turned his head to investigate. "I know that little horse was somebody's pet once. His legs have been fed. They sold him for that, I reckon."

Randolph was delighted to have Mary all to himself. Her Virginian accent, not too marked, was the pleasantest sound he had heard for a long time, and she was so perfectly normal and "daylight." He thanked Richard mentally for that expression. It might have been invented for Mary.

To her he said:

"You are certainly the most endearing person, Mary. Shall I stop somewhere and get you some sugar?"

But Mary laughed and said no, that she wanted her tea so dreadfully it made her selfish.

"Where are we going for our tea?" she asked him. "Not to an ultra smart place, please. I'm so tired of Ritz-Carltons and Empire frocks."

"Well," said Randolph, when in a quiet place she had been served with tea and a toasted muffin.

"Ah," she replied, twinkling at him through her short lashes which always seemed rumpled somehow, and which gave such charm to her light eyes. "I see that you want me to unburden myself on the subject of Richard."

"You've seen a good deal of him this time?"

"N—no. I'm not up to Richard's standard . . . but enough——"

"You don't think Europe has improved him?"

"Richard," said Mary thoughtfully, "is like integral calculus to me—a mere name. Or, perhaps, I should say like the Fourth Dimension, only I believe you can see through all sides of a thing at once in the Fourth Dimension, and you can't see through even one side of Richard."

Something in her tone, whimsical though it was, made Randolph ask,

"You don't think there's any real evil in the boy, do you, Mary?"

If he had hoped for a quick denial he was disappointed, for Mary considered this and then said:

"Not in the way you mean,—but it's not good for man to be alone—'that's in the Bible,' as Aunt Lucy used to say—and Richard dwells alone in a splendid emptiness of which he is the centre. In plain language, I don't think anybody in the whole world is real to Richard but himself

. . . You, I, his mother, *every*body," she waved a bit of muffin in a circle before putting it into her mouth, " . . . we're just parts of his dream. He'd grind *any*body's bones to make him not bread, but cake. You know I never was crazy about Richard," she ended apologetically. Randolph smiled, a little wryly.

"No, I know you never were, that's just why I value your opinion so much. You're sure to be just to the people you don't like."

"That's a great compliment, Owen."

"I meant it for one, Mary."

He looked so sober and disturbed that Mary rummaged her mind hurriedly for something soothing.

"Perhaps he'll outgrow all this . . . this . . . " she hesitated for a word, "all this *demi-deuil* art," she continued, twinkling in spite of herself, "and Mrs. Pierce-Hulls and things."

"What do you make of that lady?"

"Why," said Mary, "at first sight she seems to belong to the class that uses three-cent stamps instead of two to match its violet letter-paper, but I've met her once or twice before and I think her mind is really ruled stationery with a bunch of flowers in the corner. Perfectly proper, you know, if a little ornate. 'Striking but chaste,' as the stationers tell you."

Randolph smiled again, but said,

"I'm rather worried, Mary."

"Yes," she answered simply, "I understand."

She knew that he was thinking of World's-End, and its future administration, and of all those other vital interests which would be left in Richard's hands if Owen passed on his property to him. They both sat silent for some minutes and Mary thought of the painful day seven years ago when Sally had been informed by Owen himself of the new disposals that he had been making of some of his property, and of how Sally, in her maternal greed, had told Mary that she believed Owen was becoming mentally unbalanced. She had even talked wildly of a "commission of lunacy" to enforce trusteeship—for, by the new investments that he had made, Randolph had much reduced his income.

Mary recalled Sally as she had looked that day,—frustrated in her desire to grasp all that could be grasped for her offspring, and how in that hour she, Mary, had de-

cided that maternal love can be spiritual or animal, just as any other love can, and that only when it is more spiritual than animal is it beautiful. In Sally that day she had seen the tigress that would gladly rend a Buddha to give meat to its cub.

And she also recalled the sudden up-rush of adoration that had mingled with her love for Owen when she gathered out of Sally's incohereneies the true facts of his offence—selling a good portion of his gilt-edged bonds and securities in the great bodies that gorge on profit, he had bought outright cotton-mills and factories of different kinds in Virginia and other states, and these he proposed to run on a system which would share all profits equally with the workers, exclude child-labour, and reduce the working-hours to eight. There were other socialistic enormities which Mary could not exactly recall.

"What are you smiling at, Mary?" Owen asked her.

"Oh, just at a trifle that came back to me—one of Sally's ways—nothing worth telling."

"I wish I had your happy nature," he said, with real wistfulness. "If you saw a bit of thistle-down floating by I believe you'd smile at it. The least thing makes you happy."

"I made a prayer once, years ago, when I was just a child," said Mary. "I remember I was up in the hay-loft and I felt so joyous just watching old 'Dick'—the old carriage horse that they used to let me ride sometimes, you know—just watching him prick his ears and twitch his hide as I dropped grains of corn on him through a chink—dear me! What a long sentence! But I was so happy, and it was such a little thing to make me happy that I had a sudden inspiration and I said, 'Oh, Lord, please increase my happiness in little things,'—and it was answered," she ended, laughing.

"It was a lovely prayer," said Randolph warmly, "and remarkable for a child to make. But," he sighed, "I can take pleasure too in little things,—a ride on 'The Clown' —the scent of the earth after rain . . . it's the big things that weigh so heavily—— If I had married, perhaps . . . "

"Yes, perhaps," said Mary.

"But to marry without being wholly in love . . . "

"No . . . it would be dreadful to marry without being wholly in love," said Mary.

He came back to the idea which was haunting him.

"Now, about Richard," he began, "do you know, I have a very queasy conscience sometimes about the part I've played in Richard's life."

"Why you've played a splendid part towards him!" exclaimed Mary, rounding her clear eyes at him partly in surprise, partly in vexation. "You've been a great deal more to him than most fathers are to their sons, ever since Mr. Bryce died."

Her tone said, "I don't like my friends abused to me even when they do it themselves."

"What a staunch little partisan you are, Mary!" said Randolph, and he touched her hand affectionately as it lay before her on the table. "But most fathers don't represent the ideal to me, and I'm afraid I've . . . well . . . shirked things a bit with Richard."

"What, for instance?" demanded Mary, still unsympathetic.

"I ought to have kept him more with me . . . got at him more, as you might say."

"Not I," denied Mary vigorously. "I'd like to see anyone 'get at' Richard through all that paraphernalia of affectation."

"But when he was younger. . . ."

"He was affected in his cradle,—I'm sure of it," said Mary firmly. "I'm sure if he could have spoken he would have declared that he preferred an ink-bottle to his milk-bottle,—or a mixture, perhaps, because it would have been more subtle."

"I think you're too hard on him, dear."

This "dear" and the trouble in his eyes quite melted Mary, who was meltable at the best of times. "Well, granted that I am," she said, "that doesn't make it more reasonable for you to be too hard on yourself. And as for Richard," she broke off and the dance in her eyes began again, "I think my special prejudice dates from the day (he was eighteen) when I was sewing in the alcove window of Sally's room, and he came in (he didn't see me, of course) and powdered his nose before going to ride with a girl. You can't imagine what a horrid sight it is to see a young man powder his nose!"

Randolph joined in her bubble of laughter over this, but ended by saying:

"I'm not going to let you wheedle me from my point, Mary. It seems to me that I'm partly responsible for that powdering of his nose."

"Now," returned Mary, "that is sheer nonsense. His father and mother had the bringing up of him until he was seventeen, and everyone knows that it's in his childhood a boy gets his strongest bent!"

"There are a great many things that may be un-bent between seventeen and twenty-six, Mary."

"I oughtn't to have used the word 'bent' about Richard," said Mary sharply, "I should have said creased. He's made of too flimsy a material to bend."

"Now . . . now . . . ," protested Randolph.

"You've done everything for him—everything," persisted Mary. "Travelled with him, read with him, given him everything . . . " she broke off and said, on another key, "there, perhaps you might have done better by him,—I mean given him less."

"It's a hard question . . . " said Randolph, rather sadly. "One doesn't know exactly where to begin or where to leave off in these questions. You're afraid of interfering with individuality and then you find there's a twist you might have straightened."

"Richard is *all* twist," said Mary. "He's a human arabesque!"

And Randolph, smiling, said again, "now . . . now, Mary."

"Well—what is this particular twist that you might have straightened?" asked she grudgingly.

"Exercise," he answered. "The boy doesn't take any. Boxing, fencing, swimming—I wanted to teach him fencing, and the artistic side appealed to him at first,—but he soon got bored with it. I ought to have insisted, I'm afraid."

"What good would that have done?" asked practical Mary. "He would have dropped it as soon as he got away from you. He was always a physically indolent boy. That's why he's so lanky now. I'm sure he thinks that lankiness is beautiful."

And she looked at the vigorous, well-knit figure before her with its splendid elasticity, so noticeable even in repose, and contrasted it in her mind with the flat drawing of Richard's long, not ungraceful, but pithless form.

"I don't see how he could grow up near you and not want to be every inch a man if only in his body," she said, "but he probably thinks it dreadfully bourgeois to be six

feet two and able to lift a hundred and seventy pounds in one hand."

"So you even remember the number of pounds," laughed Randolph. "You are an insidious flatterer, Mary, dear."

"Of course I remember the number of pounds—and the number of feet and inches you've jumped. And exactly how many miles you've swum in contests and . . . and all of it. What's the use of being the proud friend of a real athlete if you don't remember the terms of his prowess?"

"You are certainly the greatest dear, Mary," said he, and at that moment he decided that he was incapable of falling in love with any woman since he had not fallen in love with Mary. While she, looking at his dark, eager face, in which so much of the boy still survived, felt that it was good to have loved Owen and no other man, even if she had to die a lonely old maid for the privilege, with nothing but memories and his friendship to the last as solace.

"Are you coming to World's-End this spring with Sally?" he asked, breaking the silence which had followed his last remark, and thinking, as was indeed the case, that it would be useless to look for sympathy from Mary in his self-reproachful misgiving about Richard.

"No—I can't be there till the summer. But I've promised Sally to come by the first of July."

"That's good," he said heartily, "for I won't be able to get there myself until then. I'm running down next week to look over things a bit, then I must be off on a long trip among the factories."

She gave him a look of great gentleness. There was no dance in her eyes now. "Don't wear yourself out, Owen," she said.

"No danger. It does me good—all of it. I can't think how I stood it till twenty-eight, milling along in a frowsty law-office. But the training's been of use to me in many ways. Any commissions at World's-End?"

"My love to darling little Hannah," said Mary. Hannah was Owen's old coloured housekeeper who had been the maid of his grandmother and his nurse,—a character with all the best traits of the white race, yet of full negro blood. "In fact, give them all my love but especially to dear Hannah."

"They're all your devoted slaves just as much as though the war had never been," said Randolph, looking at her affectionately.

"Well . . . " she said, smiling in response, "they call themselves 'your people,' don't they?"

"I really love my old coloured folk," said he thoughtfully.

"How about the young ones?" asked Mary with another sort of smile.

"They *are* rather impossible as a rule," he admitted, "but some of them promise better things. Hannah's daughter is a nice girl."

"You had her educated for a trained nurse, didn't you?"

"Yes—in Boston."

"And she really isn't 'airified'?"

"Not a bit. When she comes to World's-End for her holidays she helps about the house in all sorts of ways as simply as possible."

"That's Hannah coming out in her—she is really a wonderful person. By the way . . . you asked me about commissions for World's-End. I've just remembered something I wish you would do for me."

"Of course—anything."

"It's just a little parcel of silk-scraps that I got my dressmaker to give me for Mrs. Ladd,—you know, the lame woman who lives at Nelson's Gift. She's such a dear, and so plucky. I was coming to take it over to her myself when I went to World's-End, but it will be so long for her to wait, and you could send a man over with it."

"I might take it myself. I haven't been to see old Nelson for some time. I always feel as though I were interrupting his work."

"He's still at his book on the Nelsons and their kin, I suppose?"

"Yes—I believe that's it."

"Have you seen Phoebe lately?"

"No—I haven't seen her since she was a little bit of a thing."

"I haven't either. She's been with her grandmother in Roanoke for years, but now I hear she's at home with her father for good. She's a little first cousin of mine, you know."

"Oh, we're all cousins in Virginia—they're related to us, too."

"They tell me she's grown into a lovely girl. I only remember her as a little thing with the whitest skin and the reddest mouth I ever saw, and passionate as a humming-bird."

"I only remember her hair," said Randolph. "I took her up before me on the saddle once for a canter over the lawn, and her hair flew back into my face. I remember it because it was all dappled, brown on gold."

Mary laughed.

"'Dappled hair' . . . what a funny description. How do you mean . . . 'dappled'?"

"Why, just that," said Owen. "It was dappled with a darker shade just as the quarters of some sorrel horses are."

"I'm afraid the poor child has rather a dreary life," she said presently. "She must be about twenty now. I was devoted to her mother when I was a child. She was a lovely woman. She died when Phoebe was six. I hadn't seen her for years, but I remember crying when I heard that Aunt Mildred was dead." She paused a moment. "Do you know? . . . It *would* be nice . . . " then she paused again.

"What would be nice?" urged Randolph.

"I was just thinking that it would be so lovely for little Phoebe if Sally would have her at World's-End this summer for a week or two."

"Why, of course. I'll tell Sally."

"You'll have to manage it a little."

"Manage it? Why?"

"Sally is so dreadfully particular about the young girls that Richard meets."

"Capital! I'll see that he meets this one. If she's so pretty she may wipe out the memory of Mrs. Pierce-Hull. Richard might fall desperately and humanly in love with her and solve all our problems."

"He'll never fall desperately and humanly in love with anyone," said Mary firmly. "His type is *'La Morte Amoureuse.'* A Virginia country-bred maiden would be far too 'daylight' for Master Richard."

"Well, we'll have her at World's-End in any case, since you wish it," said Randolph.

"Thank you," said Mary, with warmth. "You're always so nice to me, Owen."

"And what are you to me?"

"Just Mary," she said demurely, and the little dance in her eyes hid something very different from laughter. Then she glanced down at her watch, and sprang up quite horrified, saying that she would have only twenty minutes to dress for dinner and that her gown had two tunics and a sash with fifty hooks.

IV

OWEN'S thoughts were full of Mary after he had taken her to Sally's flat, and, as he walked along the bitter streets under the sagging snow-filled sky, he thought of her courage and her ever-willing sweet unselfishness brought so triumphantly out of the drudging years that she had spent in the care of a hysterical, self-absorbed old aunt, now happily dead, as he reflected with satisfaction. But Aunt Lucy had made what post-mortem amends she could (though utterly unrealising that she had any amends to make) by leaving Mary all her small property. It was truly small, the income amounting to only fifteen hundred a year, but it seemed wonderful to Mary, who declared that she could never get used to such riches and the wonder of having all her time at her own disposal. Now she could work quietly on the charming fairy-tales which had always brought her some fame and a little money. She had even admitted to Sally once that she really missed her poor Aunt Lucy, for, after all, it was a good feeling to have another so dependent upon one for all joy and comfort.

"Mary's an angel. She says that she really *misses* her Aunt Lucy." Sally had passed it on to Owen, who had retorted by saying that Mary's only fault was a tendency to sentimentalism and that she had better not go about quoting "Now Lucy's dead and oh! The difference to me!" because people who didn't know her as they did might misunderstand its true significance, and think very naturally that she alluded to the fifteen hundred a year disencumbered of Aunt Lucy's hysteria. Sally had called him unfeeling and said that it would cut Mary to the quick to hear of his saying such things, and Owen had replied rather sharply that she never would hear them unless Sally told her,—this remark producing a coolness between brother and sister for some days. He smiled now

at the recollection. Sally's temper was so uncertain—the least spark burnt a hole in it as in gauze—but he loved Sally dearly, chiefly, though he did not realise it, on account of those mutual nursery experiences which are always either a bond or a severance in after years. Sally had been a regular little mother-sister to him in those days. Now his was the paternal part—poor Sally! Always chafing so at the loss of her own money which had slid with Peter's through the steep chute of speculation.

With a start, Randolph woke suddenly to his surroundings. It was the seventh of January in the savage winter of 1912, and the cold bit like flame. His morning had been spent with others of a like mind in trying to make some provision for the poor against the evil days of freezing and starvation ahead. It had been like trying to feed Behemoth on aphides, and he thought of the first three headlines in "The Times" that morning, printed side by side with no thought of dramatic contrast. The first ran thus: "Eight dead of cold—City's poor suffer." The second began: "$200,000 for a painting." The third stated that "$49,675 had been paid for two rare books, one of which was the famous Gutenberg Bible."

Roused by the fierce cold, he found himself staring up at the ugly, brown church from which a stone had fallen that autumn and crushed a workingman as though to remind him that his class were outsiders and must not venture too near sacred edifices where millionaires handed round the plate. He went quickly on, urged both by the cold and a sudden pang of homesickness for World's-End, as primal as a pang of hunger. He longed to be once more where such as he could make happy were happy, and to forget the stark sights and sounds of the freezing, starving city, if only for a few weeks, in the august spaces of the winter countryside.

Three days later he was driving over the snowy roads, through the iron-hued woods, to World's-End, and New York and its problems lay far behind him, like a sickness of the spirit which has turned to a new life.

The sky was clear and grey as ice, star-dusted and overblown by wisps of gauzy cloud. On either side of the sleigh the blurs of light from its lamps ran up and down over weeds and banks and fences like friendly will-o'-the-wisps, anxious to show the way. He could see the horses' breath jetting hot from their nostrils, as in old engravings

of the steeds of Phæton. They went ever up and up through rolling pasture-lands and fields, already sown with winter oats and wheat, across brooks strangely silent, sleeping under their shields of ice. And always, there before him, majestic and wistful at the same time, soared the lovely outline of the mountains that seemed part of his boyhood, that took part in his manhood, that he always thought of as sharing his old age with something of that mute sympathy in things ancient for the eld of man.

Owen leaned back among the bear-skin rugs, savouring this drive homeward through the winter night as only one so intensely home-loving and country-loving could have done. David, the coachman, a dark, taciturn negro of forty, thoroughly reliable, as the taciturn so often are, and especially devoted to his master—though not in a voluble, picturesque way—had told him that all was well at World's-End, and that their Christmastide had been made very happy by the presents he had sent, though they "cert'ny had missed him."

As he leaned there, borne swiftly over the snow-softened roads by the pair of strong young bays that he had bred himself, with the pungent, healthy odour of their warm hides blown back to him, with the landscape that he loved like a familiar face unfolding about him, and the stern, yet friendly stars in their accustomed places above the mountains, he experienced something of that "feeling akin to ecstasy," which Tolstoi mentions in a letter to his wife, written upon reaching Yasnaya after a period spent in Moscow. He recalled the very words which so exactly expressed his own mind: " . . . After all that—Orion and Sirius above the Crown Woods, the fluffy, silent snow, a good horse, good air, good Misha, and the good God." All speculative thoughts left him. During those moments he was content simply to Be.

After passing the old wrought-iron gates of World's-End they still had a mile to drive through the grounds, or what Sally loved to call the "Park." Huge American walnut and tulip trees made Gothic groinings overhead. The oxidised silver of poplar stems went by in stately file. American lindens, English elms, maples, ash, birch, acacias and beech lifted their delicate fret-work against the stars, for Randolph's paternal grandmother had been a lover of lordly trees and it was to her that World's-End owed its present charm, both of grounds and house. He thought,

as he had so often thought before, of what a wonderful old woman his grandmother had been. A statesman's able wife, so good and wise a mistress to her slaves that they still visited her grave in affectionate remembrance—an architect of real talent—the whole simple, lovely façade of World's-End was of her designing,—a shrewd if light essayist, a good though not profound scholar, a reader of men, last, but not least, a perfect keeper of her own household and a sincere and practical Christian.

He could see her now, as plainly as when he was a lad, drifting lightly as a leaf down the long halls of World's-End in her little heelless shoes with their back ankle-ribbons crossed over white thread stockings, the one damask rose that she always wore showing through the soft tulle folds at her neck, and the broad strings of her white tarlatan cap floating behind her.

. . . They were crossing the little Green Flower river that curved so prettily through the grounds. When they had passed the low stone bridge they would be at the foot of the south lawn, and he would see the lighted windows of the house. Yes, there they were—soft orange oblongs between the white columns of the east and west wings. And above he could see the flickering glow behind the panes of his bedroom windows that told of a log fire.

Up the East Avenue they went at a swinging trot, the horses freshening as they felt the stable near. And Randolph too had a pleasant quickening at the heart as he neared home after his long, drudging absence.

V

WORLD'S-END might have been aptly called The House of Columns, for next to her love for the boles of great trees had been his grandmother's passion for Doric columns—and their white stucco shafts, a stately regiment standing as though at attention before the walls of old English brick, guarded the entire front, upheld great loggias at the end of either wing, and supported a noble portico at the back.

Both panels of the great mahogany door were thrown wide and Owen saw, as he had known that he should, Hannah's trim little figure against the gold-white background

of the hall. Old Jonathan, her husband, also born a slave at World's-End, had been waiting at the foot of the front steps, and now poured forth a torrent of greetings and good wishes, as he took his master's bag from him. Owen shook the gnarled black hand warmly and then sprang up the shallow steps like a boy towards his old nurse and friend. "Dear little Hannah. How good to be at home again! Are you well? No cough?"

And he took both her hands and looked down at her affectionately, while her soft, loving negro eyes quietly drank in his face with the look of a Mary welcoming her only son who is also a god.

All that she said, however, not being gifted with the power of exuberant self-expression, was:

"I'm real well, dear Mr. Owen, sir. Is *you* well? You *looks* well, thank God."

"I'm always well, Hannah, thank you. But your cough —you haven't told me about your cough?"

"The medicine you sent have cure it, Mr. Owen. I don't cough a speck."

"Good! . . . good!" said he. "And everyone else is well?"

"Yes, sir—all yo' people is well, white and coloured. Yo' coloured people is most *too* well. . . . "

She broke off and smiled with a shy sort of mischievousness that he knew of old had something behind it.

"That's mighty funny, Hannah," said he, smiling in response. "*Too* well! How can that be?"

She gave him a droll, demure glance out of her big, dark eyes, so much too large for her little dark face.

"They're so well they got real sassy, Mr. Owen. I reckon they like that man Jeshron in the Bible—he wax fat an' kick, you know."

"What are they kicking about, Hannah?"

"Oh, that's jes' my way o' puttin' it, Mr. Owen. They ain't *kickin'* about anything, but they so satisfied over all those nice presents you sent 'em Christmas, they lay they *bound* to come here tonight an' thank you."

She gave him another glance, and added with sly gravity.

"They're right in the East Hall now, Mr. Owen, a whole chance of 'em. I do hope you won't mind. I couldn't put a bit of sense in 'em. They jes' *would* come."

"Can I have some supper first, Hannah?" asked he drolly.

"The *idea,* Mr. Owen! As if I'd let you be worried with all that passel of gooses before you had the good supper I fixed for you with these little old black hands!"

When he had partaken of a tenth of the good things that Hannah's love had prepared, he went with her to the East Hall to greet and be greeted by "his people."

They were ranged along the white panelled walls in shades of brown as varied as a russet wood in autumn, a gathering from different parts of the whole neighbourhood, men and women, young and old;—about a score of those who had been the slaves of his parents and grand-parents, with their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

He caught a glimpse of the dark, melodramatic face of "Brother Minor," the negro pastor of Hannah's church, and guessed that he would have to support an address from that quarter—but it did not annoy him, only stirred something warm and deep in his own nature which always went out to his Brothers of the Dark Face, and brought him back this touchingly full measure of affection.

There was one that he did not recognise, however, an old, old man with white wool and filmy eyes, so curved and feeble on his hickory staff that he seemed the emblem of a past social order.

As Randolph spoke to each in turn he took them by the hand, and when this ancient's hand was in his, so frail, so trembling, with its bent, yellow-lined fingers, he said gently:

"Who are you, uncle? I haven't seen you before."

The old man peered dimly up at him, and parted his thick lips that trembled like his hand, but no words came from them. He only gazed and gazed and two tears, slow and difficult, as though they were the last of many, gathered on his shrivelled eyelids.

Hannah came softly up, her face very kind and pitiful.

"He's the oldest living man what belonged to my dear old Master—yo' grandfather, Mr. Owen. His name is Gared Douglas. He's wandered up here to die, I reckon, all the way from Culpepper."

She laid her hand gently on the old man's arm.

"Uncle Gared—this is yo' ole Marster's son, come home again."

Then the old negro found his voice. It was faint and childish and trembled like his hand and his lips.

"Dee Lawd takes away," he said, "an' dee Lawd gives ag'in. . . . Blessed be dee name ov dee Lawd."

" 'Scuse him if he talks foolishness, Mr. Owen," said Hannah anxiously. "He's got innocent like a little child once mo'."

Owen led the old man to one of the hall chairs.

"Sit down here, Uncle Gared," he said kindly. "You're too old to stand about."

He helped the bent body to lower itself into the chair, saying, "I suppose little Hannah here has given you a good supper."

The old negro only gazed and gazed at him. At last he said:

"Is you my young Marster come home again?"

"I'm Owen Randolph, the son of Owen Randolph," said Randolph, smiling.

But the old man did not smile. His forehead grew pitifully anxious over the dim, steady gaze that he kept upon Owen's face.

"Young Marster . . . " he said, "kin I ax you a favour?"

Hannah's soft voice slipped in.

"Now don't you get to talkin', Uncle Gared, child. You jes' set quiet an' let the young Marster talk to you."

Still with that look of the old smitten hound crawling to its master's feet to fix its dying eyes on his face, old Gared said again:

"Kin I ax you a favour, young Marster?"

Randolph put his hand on the other's shoulder.

"That you can," he said, "ask right on."

With the most intense and piteous appeal that he had ever heard in a human voice the old negro said:

"Den, young Marster, will you please suh, tuh buy me?"

" 'Buy you'?" said Owen, thinking that he could not have understood.

"Yessuh—buy me back. I'll sell myself real cheap. You kin hev me fo' fifty dollars, Marster. Dat ain't much even furrer ole man lak me, but I wants a gravestone fuh me an' Susan. You see, young Marster, I want to *b'long* tuh somebody. Susan's gone. I ain't got chick nor chile nor kith nor kin. . . . Gared he *so* lonesome! Buy

me an' lemme stay home wid you, young Marster! Buy me, an' keep me home!"

Owen found it hard to speak. As soon as he could do so he said:

"I don't need to buy you to do that, Uncle Gared. You shall stay with me and have a home at World's-End as long as you live."

The old negro caught his hand and held it to his breast.

"Glory! Glory!" he cried, transfigured.

And all the others intoned "Glory! Glory! Praise Gawd! Amen!"

Hannah with the tears streaming down her face came and led the old man away. "Now res' quiet," she murmured to him. "You got home at larst, po' ole man. Me an' the Master'll keep care of you."

The deep silence that followed was broken by Hannah's pastor, who asked leave to "make a prayer of thanksgiving." In words warm from his heart it came, simple and eloquent:

"O Lord, Thou who did send Thy Darling Son to teach men how to love an' serve each other—to whom is neither Jew nor Gentile, nor black nor white—bend down and weave our heart strings, and the heart strings of this noble man, in a strong web of onderstandin' that to the second an' third ginyration, his childun's childun, an' our childun's childun, may dwell in peace and goodwill together. Amen!"

With this prayer still in his ears, Randolph went up to bed. He lay long awake, however, in the old mahogany bedstead, with its carven posts and valance of white dimity, watching the firelight play upon the white walls and ceiling, casting there the pattern of the pierced brass fender and giving evanescent life to the portrait of his mother in her blue tulle gown of the sixties with white japonicas on hair and breast.

It was so good to be at home that he lay awake wilfully, for the pleasure of realising it. The logs snapped and fell between the andirons just as when he was a boy and this was the nursery—filling the black chimney-throat with clustered sparks—"people going into church" his mother used to call them. The great elm outside his window cracked with the bitter cold just as then. In the upper hall, slightly muffled by distance, the old clock gave its wheezing, asthmatic groan before striking eleven, just as

it had done through his grandfather's and father's life, and all the years of his own childhood and boyhood and manhood.

Far away, like a cry from the sad civilisation from which he was a refugee for a little while, the long, melancholy note of a passing train tore through the quiet night.

His collie, "Rab," started up, sniffing at a coal which had fallen too near him on the hearth, then lay down again with a deep sigh, nearer his master's bed. There was no wind, but a low, gentle droning, like a chord of music, played through the chinks and keyhole of his door. Every book, every object in this room was a friend, dear and familiar from his boyhood. He turned over, closed his eyes, opened them again to look at what he loved, lay thus, opening and closing his eyes, turning in the great bed with its sleek linen which smelt of *citronalis* and rose-geranium, the sweet perfume that always brought his mother before him with her beautiful, sorrowful brown eyes and lovely smile. . . .

Tomorrow he would take a long ride on "The Clown" through the soundless snow. . . . "Rab" would leap happily in front. . . . He might carry that parcel to Nelson's Gift for Mary. . . . He would skate too. . . . He would get into that old coat that was so comfortable. . . . But no, he must wear a decent coat if he went to the Nelsons'. . . . No matter . . . in any coat it would be delightful. . . . But he could not sleep. He was too happy through and through.

VI

THE founder of the branch of the Randolph family to which Owen belonged had been a very distant kinsman of the grandfather of John Randolph of Roanoke. He was the second son of "Oliver Randolph of Stryde Hall and Cayleford in Buckinghamshire, gentyleman," whose property real and personal was entailed on his elder son, Oliver, and who, on acquiring a royal grant in Virginia of some forty thousand acres, had settled it upon this second son, Owen. That this especial branch of the family had been one of considerable means in England from 1460 to 1528 the remaining records of lands bought and leased bore ample proof. That they were distinguished

by an unusual gift in affairs of state they considered due to the fact of one of them having married about 1576 a relative of that Secretary of State who kept his office under four monarchs, Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary and Elizabeth. "A man of wonderful tact. Under Henry 'he observed his humour'; in Edward's time 'kept the law'; in Mary's 'intended wholly State affairs,' and in Elizabeth's was 'religious.'"

The father of the present Owen's ancestor had taken possession of his Virginia estate in 1651, and on it his son had built "a fayre house tho' littel," in 1652. This house, which had been pulled down and replaced by another in 1730, he had called "World's-End" from its situation on a fold of the Western mountains commanding a view of both valleys and the distant range of the Blue Ridge, which doubtless seemed to the exiled Englishman like a rampart guarding the extreme end of the earth.

The motto of this branch was "Moy et le roy," and its crest "a nag's head couped, bridled, or." Owen never used his arms, as he thought such things paradoxical in an American, but Sally's path in life was pleasantly strewn with little nags' heads.

Mary had once said that she believed Sally would stamp that horse's head on her sponge if it would stick, and that the only reasonable heraldic device that *she* had ever seen borne by a Virginian was that of her friend Henry Pilkington—"a husbandman mowing, proper."

Their mother, to whom Sally attributed Owen's idealistic-socialistic vagaries, was still known in Virginia as "the beautiful Janet McCleod." She had been a lovely, wistful, melancholy, other-worldly soul, whose chief joy on earth was in dreams of heaven. Two divine passions had shared her ardent and spiritual heart, motherhood and adoration of the Christ, and she had died when Owen was ten. He had loved her as she him, and to this day the scent of flowers in a church made him shudder. Hers was the first and last funeral that he had ever attended. That coffin with its ornate silver handles, the flowers that she had loved and tended heaped upon it, so soon to be crushed by the clammy red clay; the mournful chanting of her favourite hymn, with which she had so often sung him to sleep in her tender contralto; the gowned clergyman walking before that black, oblong case, and reading words from a book which the boy denied passionately in his heart with

a sort of rage of grief, because it was hideous to him to think of his mother struggling up bewildered out of that black box at the Last Day—with shrivelled flowers tumbling about her, and the red clay in her lovely hair—all this, together with the scent of the new crape in which his grandmother and aunts were smothered, the measured tolling of the bell which wrung his every nerve like a loud, brutal voice, reminding him with rude insistence of his loss, wove about him on that day a web of horror, in which he and his dreams had been netted for many a long year after.

And when he grew to be a man he thought of the unconscious cruelty which leads pious people to let a little child's last memory of its mother's face be, not of that face alight with sweet, familiar love, but cold, stern, majestically alien, resting upon a bleak cushion of white satin with that delicately cynical smile of death which seems to say, "All you whom I loved, stand aside. You have no part in me nor I in you. There is no god but Death, and Mortality is his prophet."

For long years the thing which wrung his heart, when he recalled his mother's face as it had looked then, was the memory of the pretty black mole, like a little "*mouche*" at the corner of one eye. This little mole had been his special place to kiss in the sweet whimsy of childhood;—he had called it her "one sin" and declared that he would kiss it white before she went to heaven. And now she was in heaven and the pretty mole was still there, the tiny source of so much innocent love and laughter, there in that smug box with its neat jeweller's lining of white satin, and the grim holes where the screws would fit when the lid was put in place. Somehow this had seemed to him most horrible of all, and he had hated God for thinking of such lovely things and then defacing them so ruthlessly.

Shortly after his mother's death his father had received a highly advantageous offer to assist in building an important railway in France, and, accompanied by their mother's elder sister Susan, he and Sally went with their father to that country for an indefinite period.

In about two years from this time Aunt Susan married a French gentleman from Normandy, the Comte de Mauvigny, and was thereafter known to them by her request as "*tante* Suzanne."

Sally was educated at a convent near M. de Mauvigny's country place, and Owen sent across the Channel to Harrow.

While Sally was still learning French, embroidery and sweet manners from the gentle nuns of the "Sacré Cœur" and Owen, at Harrow, was absorbing, along with other more important things, the crisp well-bred accent that clung to him through life. Colonel Randolph himself, his work in France completed, went to Egypt to undertake some colossal engineering exploits for the Khedive.

It was there that the foundation of his great fortune was laid.

From Harrow Owen went to Oxford, and, as Colonel Randolph very wisely thought that a young man who was to inherit so considerable a fortune should know something of how to manage it, Owen had finally entered the office of his father's solicitor in New York, but, after two years of the kind of work he had never really cared for, he had withdrawn from his engagements, with his father's consent, and travelled widely in different countries for some time.

Owen had been always at heart a dreamer and a scholar, the stuff of which the man of letters rather than the lawyer is created. But writing essays, no matter how successful, did not seem to him an occupation worthy of a man's whole effort, nor a task of sufficient importance for a lifetime. The fret of the twentieth century to solve vital problems, if only in part, was upon him. His father's millions clogged his spirit. His father had earned them, he had the right of enjoyment in them, but to Owen it seemed as though by their possession he was constrained into the attitude of a nestling arrested in its development, into whose effortless, open beak the unscratched-for juicy grub is being continually dropped by those who know the joy of wings.

VII

OWEN sprang from bed with a bound next morning. A huge log-fire, just lighted, was crackling and flacking its bright pennons in the broad chimney-place, but the room was large, the thermometer little above zero, and it would take a good hour to temper that biting atmosphere —he always slept with windows and shutters wide.

The day, blue as a gentian, poured in from every quarter, a shimmering flood shot with gold. The peculiar, fairy-like radiance of reflected snow beat upon the ceiling.

He looked out. The sloping lawn was a sheet of orange-white, netted with cobalt shadows. From its surface rose the dark stems of the trees, each bearing its smoke-like web of winter twigs. The great hedges of box and thickets of mountain laurel seemed almost black in the contrasting glare. Beyond all, to the southward, flowed that band of air-washed violet beloved by all dwellers on the mountain slopes of the Western valley, the dim, dream-haunted, skyey waste of the far horizon.

After luncheon he was to ride over the farm, and then visit the schools. He decided to go for a walk. Three dogs followed or rather preceded him; Rab, who now and then ran along on his snout, gobbling snow as he did so, after the weird manner of collies—his Irish setter, "Bran," and an aged fox-terrier, whose real name "Mr. Worldly-Wise Man" had been shortened to "Wizzy."

While out riding one day Owen had heard faint yaps of distress, and, turning aside into the lane whence they proceeded, had found a bedraggled pup, struggling on its side in a puddle. To take it up before him on the saddle, regardless of mud, was Owen's way—one of the many ways that Sally found so trying. He carried it back to World's-End, gave it warm baths with his own hands, and sent for the vet. Diagnosis declared Wizzy's ailment to be strychnine, probably absorbed while devouring poisoned meat set for weasels or such stragglers as himself. He was cured, but ever after his little spine had resembled the letter "S," and when he ran his hind legs went faster and more jauntily than his front legs, giving him a rakish, devil-may-care aspect totally out of keeping with his serious, rather cynical character, and his solemn eyes, with their white underrims in which was always a tear, as in old prints of the repentant Magdalene. It is safe to say that "Wizzy" had the most tender place in his master's affections, for he was allowed to sleep on the foot of his bed, while "Rab" was only permitted the hearth-rug and "Bran" had a kennel of his own. The last two, as one might say, were dear and familiar friends, but Wizzy was more like an uncomely orphan child that had no one else to love him. He repaid this love ten-fold, as is the other-worldly way of Wizzies, and was used to regard his master when he re-

turned from an absence with an expression which must have resembled that of Adam before his fatal offence, as he gazed up at the Lord come to walk in Eden in the cool of the evening.

Owen whistled as he drew near the stables—a whistle not meant for dogs, as they well knew, for they paid no attention whatever—but which set all the horses nickering, and caused leaf-eared heads with great, gleaming eyes like bubbles of dark glass to be thrust over the gates of loose boxes.

He bestowed sugar with impartial justice, smiling to himself as he fed Richard's mare, it was so like Richard to have a jet-black, hysterical mare, with no speck of white on hoof or hide and to call her "El Borak," after the steed that bore Mahomet to Paradise. But his own favourite riding-horse, "The Clown," claimed his chief attention. He and "The Clown" were real cronies. Owen said that The Clown was a wag, and that some animals had a sense of humour, no matter what scientists declared. A roguish eye was certainly The Clown's, roguish and pathetic at the same time. He was used to gaze up at his master, as Owen came down the front steps to mount him, with his forehead lifted into two wrinkled eyebrows by a look of such wistful intensity as made his equine face different from the face of all other horses. Some dogs will look man in the eye, but The Clown was the only horse that Owen had ever known to do so.

He was a big, sixteen and a half hand, up-standing grey, rising nine, with a fine forehand, but a little too short in the quarters, though strong, or he could not have borne Owen's fourteen and a half stone so blithely. His sire Grey-Eagle's blood kept him from coarseness and his crest and thropple were like an Arab's. But it was his fantastic, gay, jest-loving nature that especially endeared him to Owen. The two were far more like dog and master than horse and master.

Owen rubbed The Clown's mousey nose and he returned the attention by taking Owen's sleeve between soft prehensile lips and bunting him gently. As The Clown was being saddled, George Downer, the manager, came into the stable yard.

"Anything wrong, George?" asked Owen.

"No, sir, I only just thought of something. You said this mornin' you might be ridin' over to Nelson's Gift—

and I just remembered what I'd heard about the Hollybrook Woods."

"What about them?" asked Owen, glancing quickly to where the wood in question made so comely a feature of the winter landscape.

"I heard tell that Mr. Nelson was goin' to sell 'em to a saw-mill."

"To a saw-mill! The Hollybrook Woods!" exclaimed Owen, aghast.

"That's what I've heard tell—I know how much you think of 'em, and I thought you might want to put in a bid."

"It's to be an auction then?"

"Yes, sir—sealed bids."

"I think I can settle with Mr. Nelson without waiting for an auction."

"Don't you pay *too* much for them woods, sir," said Downer, giving him a brotherly look out of shrewd, direct, iron-grey eyes."

VIII

THAT ride through the snowy fields and woods towards Nelson's Gift might have been a progression of Death on the Pale Horse for all the sound it made. It was like cantering through a white dream. The snow was so dry and fluffy that it did not even "ball" in The Clown's hoofs, the air so still that its bitter edge was not too biting. Owen sat loosely, far back in the saddle, giving himself to the long rock-a-bye of the grey's even gallop, with all the primitive pleasure of a boy in a swing. The crows were tremendously busy over some social disruption. They flew and cawed and lighted and cawed by twos and threes and in posses on every fence-rail. Under the eye of a great, round, daffodil-coloured sun, the earth lay in her dazzling winding-sheet more beautiful thus than ever.

Nelson's Gift was a small, very old house, half of frame, half of brick, tucked away among gentle, pastoral hills at the back of Hollybrook Wood, about five miles from World's-End. On the side nearest the house the wood was fenced off, and a five-barred gate with a rusty chain arrangement had to be opened. As Owen was struggling with this chain, not wishing to dismount if he could avoid it, he saw a tall girl coming towards him down the hill

on the crest of which Nelson's Gift was situated. She waved her hand as though bidding him wait for something, and, glancing down at the other side of the gate, he found that he had been struggling with a padlocked chain. As she came nearer he saw that the hair under her little fur hat was brilliant and shaded like a pheasant's breast, and he was sure that this could be no other than Phoebe Nelson.

She came up quite breathless from hurrying through the deep snow.

"I'm *so* sorry," she said in a fresh, joyous young voice which seemed to express that she was delighted to be speaking to a live human being, who was not her father or the overseer, or a "person of colour." "We thought everybody in the neighbourhood knew that this road was closed now."

As she was speaking she thrust a key into the rusty padlock, and turned it with both hands, but it would not give. Owen had dismounted as she came up, and offered to help, telling his name as he did so.

"Oh, I knew that," she said with a smile, friendly and joyous like her voice. "I've seen you often when I was a little girl. I'm Phoebe Nelson."

She was dressed in a short skirt and jacket of heavy grey corduroy and wore "rubber-boots." Where the sun struck her hair it was like fire and the fur of her cap a rim of blue ashes above it.

Looking at her, Owen recalled Mary's saying about the "whitest skin and the reddest mouth." As she looked back at him he noted her lashes, short, thick and black like Mary's, and remembered that her mother had been a Talliaferro. The eyes under those lashes, however, were not pale grey like Mary's, but blue—all sorts of blue—dark, light, greenish, purplish—a blue that seemed to overflow and tinge the whites, so that behind the gathered lashes long pools of varied blueness gleamed with an effect of jewels fallen among dark grasses.

She was not what could be called a perfectly beautiful girl, though, in spite of her lovely colouring. Her nose was too short, her chin a little too prominent, her mouth, while it had the inimitable silken smoothness of youth, too full—a mouth not of the spirit, but triumphantly and radiantly of the flesh—laughter and pleasure-loving—curved out at the centre, carved up at the corners.

The eyes and mouth of Phoebe seemed emblematic of the two natures which struggle in every child of man. And Owen recalled another of Mary's descriptive phrases—"as passionate as a humming-bird." Phoebe's vivid young face had in it that will-to-live and to live ardently which, more than anything, perhaps, makes a human being interesting to speculate about.

"I'm *so* sorry," she was repeating as, the gate now open, he came through. "What a dear horse. I do believe he's asking me for sugar."

"The Clown" was nudging and nuzzling at her pockets, much as a calf invites its mother to be more generous with its supply of milk. She pinched his soft, rubbery lips with knowing fingers. "I do *love* horses," she said, "and dogs. . . . " Stooping, she stroked Wizzy along his curved spine, and, while savouring the caress, that little cynic looked up through frozen tears at his master as if saying, "Is this a person I should really know?" Rab and Bran were far ahead in hysterical pursuit of a rabbit. "Dear, dear!" continued Phoebe, addressing Wizzy, "you certainly are a scornful little dog. What twisted his poor little back?" she ended, warm pity in her fresh voice.

Wizzy's story was told as they walked together up the slope of the white hillside.

Her father had said once, referring to Owen, that he was as near being a Socialist as one sprung from Randolph and McCleod could be. Glancing at him now, she thought how dreadful it would be to see beautiful World's-End cut up into kitchen gardens, and the house (so she imagined) turned into a sort of Socialistic inn where no one would pay board, of course, but each would dig in his horrid little garden.

Phoebe was more of a mid-Victorian maiden than a modern one. Her short, blithe life had been spent chiefly in these Virginia mountains among old-fashioned, somewhat straitly bred elders,—a Bishop-fearing, God-respecting community who still looked upon a proper marriage as the chief event in a woman's life. Far from her had passed the scythed wheels of the woman's movement, the heavy tread of organised charities, the cohorts of improving lecturers under the pied banners of culture to the shrill music of the pipes of progress. She was as full of romance as though she had lived in the days when the "Waverly" novels thrilled all hearts.

She stole shy, appraising glances at Owen as they trudged on side by side through the two feet of salt-like snow. She decided in her girl's phraseology that he was "very handsome; that he did not show his age." If only he had been seven and twenty instead of seven and forty . . . it might have been *he* . . . (in her thought Phoebe said comfortably, "it might have been *him*") that wonderful lover who in her firm conviction was to appear suddenly, all splendid like Lohengrin before Elsa, and bear her away to realms of married bliss. In every wind she heard the possible beat of his horse's hoofs—in the sudden opening of a door:—*he* might stand behind it. When a letter of introduction was sent to her father—this time, instead of some frowsy professor, it might be *he*. When she rode on old "Councillor" she reined in at every curve in hills and woods . . . just around that bend, hidden by the stems of the trees, he might be riding towards her. Today, when she had seen Owen at the gate her heart had given a stinging bound. What if, at last, it were *he*? She had only five more years of youth. If *he* did not come and claim her before she were five and twenty, the unspeakable disgrace of old maidhood would fall upon her. She had thought at sixteen that eighteen would be the proper age for her marriage, at eighteen she had deferred it to twenty, now, at twenty, she gave herself the leeway of five more years of celibacy. And if not wedded by that time—the deluge! It seemed so dreadful a contingency that she would not even consider it in her thought, but brushed it away with an "of course."

It never occurred to her to look for her mate among those whom she already knew. A lot of good-looking, long-legged cousins, scattered about among her native mountains, meant only "those boys" to her. She had seen but little of the world. Some weeks every year spent with a cousin at the University of Virginia, two visits to Baltimore, a fortnight in New York last winter with her Aunt Frances, who had a little flat, and who gave her an afternoon tea and two theatre patries—this summed up her experience of the world.

"What a pity," said Phoebe to herself, stealing another narrow blue glance, "what a pity that he is forty-seven."

IX

THEY found her father in a pretty room, all panelled with dim green, and furnished with chairs and sofas covered in the cross-stitch of Queen Caroline's day, now much worn and faded. He was seated in one of those old "half-way house" chairs, with a shepherd's plaid over his knees, and his bony feet, in carpet slippers, resting on a hot brick covered also with a carpet. His collar was high and old-fashioned, reaching to his waxen gills. He wore a broad tie of black satin and a browny-black frock coat. On an array of small tables with twisted legs were scattered sheets of manuscript, documents old and new, and many books.

Phoebe said:

"Father, here is Mr. Randolph come to see you," and the old scholar smiled politely, disclosing a row of more than usually monotonous false teeth, which at once, in some odd way, gave his mouth the look of an old lady's feature astray in the countenance of masculinity. "I am very glad to see you, sir," said he. "Pardon my not rising. I have just succeeded in getting my feet warm."

Owen drew up a chair and asked how the genealogical researches were progressing.

Mr. Nelson replied with words to the effect that, when one's bark foundered on the deep of genealogy, it was always to another sea, and proceeded to read, at some length, a statement which went to prove that the families of Chevall and Cabell are probably identical, not wholly different, as he had always thought.

Phoebe sat rather dejectedly during this address, twirling a curtain tassel for one of the cats to play with, and, when the extract drew to a close, Owen, moved by the disconsolate look on the young face, resolutely changed the subject for the time being.

"By the way, sir," said he, "I'm sorry you've had to close the road from Hollybrook Wood through this estate. I hope neighbours haven't been behaving unpleasantly?"

Mr. Nelson's waxen face took on the look of someone who from a pleasant dream is wakened by falling upon the floor.

"If it were only *neighbours,* sir," he exclaimed, with

deep feeling—then, turning to his daughter, said, "Phoebe, my dear, some Madeira and a few of Patty's thin biscuit would not be amiss."

As Phoebe left the room on this errand, he turned again to Owen, saying, "I do not wish to aggravate the sense of injury which my daughter has already very strongly. She is a creature of impulse—wholly unlike either her dear mother or myself. I think I can trace the strain in her directly to an ancestress who was called 'Imperious Prue Horsemandon' from her overardent character. There is a portrait of her by Sir Thomas Lawrence at my grandfather's place in King William County. The eyes and mouth are exact replicas of Phoebe's."

"A spirited girl is a delightful thing, sir," said Owen, smiling. "May I hear what has roused my cousin Phoebe's spirit?"

"Why, sir," replied the old man, much gratified by this pleasant reminder that he was talking to a kinsman, "it is this unfortunate, I may say abominable," continued he with some heat, "question of roads."

"Of roads?" said Owen, raising his eyebrows, "is more than one road involved?"

"Two—two roads have been closed against us, Mr. Randolph—and not by strangers but by one of our own blood."

"That seems an incredible thing to happen in this neighbourhood," said Owen with genuine sympathy. "Courtesy about private roads is a tradition with us."

"It is not so with these," interrupted the old man—a flush had come into his waxy cheeks. "It is the son of my own brother's son who has done me this injury," he announced. "I can place it only to the account of one thing—the influence exerted upon him by his Scottish agent, whom he employs to manage the estate—a curmudgeon, sir, a typical curmudgeon! In fact I am convinced that it is all this man's doing!"

"But," said Owen, puzzled, "how can he own an estate so near?—your land joins mine at the Green-Flower."

"Ah," replied Mr. Nelson, his face looking worn and very aged all at once, "there you have touched the really tragic element in the matter. As you doubtless know, sir, the war completely impoverished my father—Nelson's Gift is heavily mortgaged. My chief ambition, by saving here and there, and by the royalties that I may derive from this work," he laid a rheumatic hand on the mass of manu-

script near by, "my fondest ambition,—an old man's ambition,—is to leave Nelson's Gift unencumbered to my daughter. I, therefore, compromised by allowing the young man to purchase the eight hundred acres known as 'Cross-Road Farm.' I acted hastily; too hastily. I neglected to reserve the right of way to the only road which leads from Nelson's Gift to the Station at Crewe. It is imperative that I should have a new road. Therefore, I shall have to part with Hollybrook Wood."

"Mr. Nelson," said Owen, impulsively, "I should be very glad to buy it and leave it standing, with perpetual right of way through it for Nelson's Gift."

"My dear sir," stammered the old man, "my dear sir."

He had a disconcerting habit of pulling the short hairs from his nostrils in little snatches, while talking gravely, and now it seemed as though he would denude his austere nose completely. "I cannot express to you . . ." he began again.

Suddenly his face worked violently—he snatched off his spectacles and buried his face in his handkerchief with a dislocating sneeze.

"Pardon me," he murmured, looking up, rather shamefaced. "It is a strange weakness, but I always sneeze in moments of strong emotion."

And there were tears in his little black eyes.

They had talked the matter thoroughly over by the time that Phoebe came back with the thin biscuits and Madeira. She had delayed on purpose, knowing very well that her father would prefer to explain matters to his guest in private. As she entered Owen was saying that he would begin fencing the Hollybrook Woods from the Cross-Road farm at once, and Phoebe, catching only the last words, poured the full blueness of her eyes, usually half-veiled, into a wide look of anger, exclaiming:

"'Twas I who got father to shut him out from our road to the mountain. Now he'll have to go around three miles to haul wood!"

The old man said, as sternly as his new-found relief and happiness would permit:

"We must not nurse rancour, my daughter. I have some very good news for you."

"Even the Lord didn't say we must let people jump up and down on us . . ." began Phoebe rebelliously.

"But, Father!" she hurried on in another voice, "you look tired . . . take your wine and biscuit right away."

"Serve your Cousin Owen first, my dear."

"Here's to the health of the new road," Owen said, smiling, and Mr. Nelson bowed grandly from the waist up above the shepherd's plaid and said, "*Your* health, sir."

Then he explained to Phoebe. She stood stockstill under the first shock of delight—then span round and round, glowing, sparkling. She had taken off her fur cap, and Owen saw a beautiful, full forehead, neither high nor low, on which the sorrel hair grew in a "widow's peak." This forehead of Phoebe's spiritualised her whole face.

"Oh!" she cried. "Oh! I think,—I think——" She ran to Owen and seized both his hands. "I think you're just splendid . . . *Cousin Owen!*"

Owen did not guess all that this "Cousin Owen" meant of loyal devotion and enthusiasm. It was Phoebe's unconditional surrender to a hero-worship that was one of the strongest emotions her nature had yet known.

He flushed up like a boy, and she cried out between tears and laughing, "Oh, father! look! He's blushing because he's done such a lovely thing!"

"My dear, my dear," remonstrated the old gentleman, much moved, "you embarrass our kind friend."

Wizzy, who had stolen in with Phoebe, here inadvertently came to the rescue by "saying his prayers" to the plate of biscuit.

"Look at the darling!" exclaimed Phoebe, rushing to him. "You *couldn't* object to such a duck of a dog as *that*, father!"

"If the little creature is Mr. Randolph's pet, he is certainly welcome," replied her father, his natural aversion from dogs completely swallowed up in warm gratitude.

Wizzy said his prayers again and again, and deity in the form of Phoebe answered them all with crisp morsels of his favourite biscuit.

"Do you find Phoebe much changed since when she was a child?" asked Mr. Nelson, seeking to divert the conversation from what promised to be too emotional a topic for this daughter who resembled "neither her dear mother nor himself."

"I should have known her by her hair anywhere," said Randolph, smiling.

"Yes, I am told that she has an unusually fine suit," admitted her parent. "To her waist, I believe."

"Below," laughed Phoebe.

"She speaks," continued the old gentleman as impersonally as though the girl had been a family portrait, "good English. I took much pains with her when she was little more than an infant. I presume that, like myself, you do not object to a Virginian accent?"

"I love it," said Owen.

"And the liquid pronunciation in such words as 'cyarpet,' 'cyar,' 'gyarden,'—do you find that pleasant to the ear?"

"Most distinetly pleasant," said Owen.

Phoebe was telling Wizzy in dumb-show that she found it embarrassing to be diseussed openly in this way.

Her father continued with impersonal calm, "I am glad to hear you say so. If you will kindly hand me that little lexieon of pronunciation—from the right-hand shelves, sixth row, next the chimney,—I will show you something of interest in regard to the question. The volume was compiled by my grandfather."

Owen handed him the volume, and, replacing his spectacles, discarded for the sneeze of emotion, the old gentleman turned the yellowed, wrinkled pages until he found the desired word.

" 'Garden,' " he read aloud, "usually pronounced 'garden,' but the elegant insert a 'y.' "

X

OWEN saw a good deal of Phoebe and her father during the two weeks that he remained at World's-End. He found the old scholar both pathetic and lovable, while the girl, with her young enthusiasms and ardent will to live, seemed to him singularly winning.

Just before leaving World's-End, at the end of the second week, he sent over a pretty sorrel mare called "Killdee" to Nelson's Gift, with a note for Phoebe tied to her bridle,—and the neat little Sowter saddle that Richard had used when a boy on her shining back,—for Phoebe, having never been able to attain to the luxury of a side-saddle, rode astride. He said in the note that he sent "Killdee" because she was such a perfect match for

Phoebe's hair, and because Phoebe's father had said that he might, also, last but really first, because "Killdee" was one of the gentlest and wisest of her sex.

It may be imagined what sort of ardent, brimming-over letter it was that Phoebe wrote him in thanks for this gift. It went astray, and he did not receive it until two months later, while in North Carolina, where he was engaged in settling some difficulties which had arisen in one of the cotton mills. He had been much hurt by Phoebe's supposed silence, for he was one of the most human of men, but now, as he read her affectionate, enthusiastic words, he blamed himself roundly for not having guessed the truth. And a vision of Phoebe herself, with her loving, lovable mouth and the blue flame of her impassioned eyes, rose before him,—and he could hear her ardent young voice exclaiming as on that first day, "I think you're just splendid, Cousin Owen!"

A letter from Sally, by the same post, informed him that she and Richard were going down to World's-End much earlier this year than usual, as Richard found it impossible to work on the Chinese Opera, which he had begun, in the noise and confusion of New York. They would be there, she thought, about the middle of April. The contrast between Phoebe's simple, single-minded letter and the thought of Richard with his Chinese opera made Owen smile.

He wrote to Sally by return post, a letter full of Phoebe and her unspoiled charm. He said at the end of his letter that he thought it would be advisable for Sally to call at Nelson's Gift,—as, among other things, Phoebe was Mary's first cousin and it would please Mary so much,—and then that after doing so, if Sally would invite Phoebe to spend a few days with her at World's-End, it would give *him* great pleasure, as he had grown very fond of her and was sure that Sally would too.

Sally showed this epistle to Richard, with lips folded inward.

"A young country girl *tête-à-tête* with me at World's-End!" said she.

"A young girl of any kind at World's-End—Good Lord!" said Richard.

"If only your uncle wouldn't thrust his ideas down one's throat so," said Sally, who was apt to be inelegant when annoyed.

"If only he would realise that the people he finds congenial to him may not be congenial to others," said her son. "A gushing young girl—and I with Chinese intervals to master. . . . Oh, Lord!" he groaned again.

"We can slip out of it somehow," said his mother firmly.

"We must," he assented as firmly.

"I don't feel like visiting *anyone* after the rush I've been in this winter. I should think Owen might realise that."

Richard just lifted an ironical lip.

"How do you expect a Socialistic sentimentalist to realise that the society of one's fellow beings is ever anything but a boon?"

"Well," replied Sally, "be that as it may, I simply refuse to have my first spring days at World's-End utterly spoiled by having a young country miss on my mind from morning till night. I shall tell Owen that I am too absolutely worn out. Of course we shall have to put up with her when Mary comes."

"Oh, I'll slip off to Newport or somewhere," said Richard cheerfully, and his mother regarded him fleetingly, with an inscrutable expression which he did not observe.

They went down to World's-End together a few days later,—World's-End, which at this season of the year resembled *"La Foret des Lilas"* of Perrault's fairy tale, all embowered as it was in swaying plumes of mauve and white. The red-bud was out in fields and woods and the orioles and wood-doves were calling from every glade and dingle. The periwinkle, too, blue and innocent as children's eyes, filled the hollows with its wistful loveliness. And through all and over all was that exquisite, elusive perfume of spring, like the perfume that might be wafted from the warm draperies and flying hair of a hamadryad.

Sally's face took on an unwonted softness as she and Richard drove through the grounds together.

"Ah! . . . I do love it," she breathed.

She put her hand on her son's hand.

"Some day," she said, "it will be yours. . . ."

"It is a rare old place," he admitted, returning slightly the pressure of her fingers. "Yes . . . here I can finish my Chinese opera."

A week went by and, having wound himself up in a skein of the dissonances of Cathay, Richard mounted "El Borak" and went for a long ride.

The servants had been much mystified as to the work which kept Richard strumming behind closed doors for many hours a day on a strange instrument which gave forth a sound that recalled both banjo and guitar, as a mule recalls horse and ass, yet is neither.

"He'll make hisse'f sick ef he don't take keer," Aunt Polly, the cook, had remarked only that morning in the kitchen. "Keepin' hisse'f shet up 'thout so much ez a mou'ful of fresh air. What he doin' in dat room makin' dem outlandish noises anyhow, Joe?"

Joe, her youngest son, one of twelve, who looked after Richard when he was at World's-End, said that "Mr. Richard done took to pickin' on some cu'yous sorter banjo what wa'nt a banjo, an' what sounded outer fix tuh *him.*"

"Well . . . Gawd be praised!" said Aunt Polly when she heard that he had ordered his horse. "Maybe dee Lawd's done wo' him out wid dat folishness, an' now he gwine ack like urrer Chrishuns once mo'. I sho' is sorry fo' Miss Sally, an' her so peert an' nachul-actin', hevin' a son what acks so flightified ez Mr. Richard. *I* bleeves he does it a-purpose. I don't 'bleeve he *enjys* hisse'f pickin' tuh hisse'f all day long an' part o' dee night lak dat. Well—glory be. Ridin'll do him a chance o' good. Ef dat mean mar' o' his'n d' jes' th'o' him, dat 'ould do him still mo' good. You hear *me!* G'long, Joe—for Jeeze' sake git him on dat hawse while he in de humour."

Borak was fresh, and Richard rode her far and fast without particularly noting where the road was leading him. When he reined in finally it was at the top of a hill strewn with the gold patines of dandelions, and at the bottom in a ford of the Green Flower river a girl was watering her horse. It was Phoebe on Killdee, and what caught Richard's eye, of course, was that remarkable hair of hers—it blazed out in a great, glowing lump at the back of her black straw hat and seemed to be on fire in the sunlight.

Richard said to himself:

"A woman with such hair must have charm." It dimmed the memory of Mrs. Pierce-Hull's fleece of gold as a torch pales a candle.

The girl here looked up, and smiled frankly. Her mare had finished drinking and was now blowing the water playfully through her nostrils, as horses like to do in running streams.

"Mind how you come down that hill," she called out to him. "There's a broken drain-pipe on the left."

She was riding astride, he now noted, and her slim young shape, in its neatly cut coat of whip-cord (she had made it herself from a pattern lent by an English friend), was charmingly boylike and nymphlike in one. This combination of contrasts was further pleasing to Richard.

"Thank you . . ." he called back as he descended gingerly. "I'm very much obliged . . . I should have been in it in another moment. . . ."

"It's downright wicked," said the girl, "the way they leave the roads in this county."

"What county am I in, please?"

"Queen Caroline.—Didn't you know?"

"No—I came from World's-End. I thought I was still in Buckfastleigh."

"From World's-End?" The girl's face lighted up. "Then," she cried after a little pause, "you must be Richard Bryce."

Richard bowed over Borak's coal-black crest. "I am," he said, "and, if I may ask, you . . . ?"

"I am Phoebe Nelson," said the girl. "I am so glad to know you. Your Uncle Owen is my cousin."

"Then I'm your cousin, too."

"Five times removed," said Phoebe, laughing.

He smiled, keeping his steady black eyes on hers. This smile was not like Owen's. There was in it something. . . . She quickened sweetly in response, withdrawing her eyes gently and looking past him up at the blue April sky now strewn with little silver shells of cloud. As she lifted her chin in doing so he saw the pulses in her white throat beating softly like the pulses in the downy body of a white moth held by the wings.

"I think we're going to have rain," she said.

"I should like very much to call at Nelson's Gift,—if you will allow me," said Richard. "We have been here a week. My mother came earlier this year because she was so tired from her winter in New York. She's quite done up, or she would have called on you before this."

"The idea!" exclaimed Phoebe, startled. "A girl like me! Why should she?"

From what she had heard, she was distinctly in awe of Sally.

"But," continued Richard in his suave voice, "if you will let me I will call in her place."

"I'm sure that father will be very glad," said Phoebe with unwonted primness, because her heart was beating a little fast.

"Then—may I come tomorrow?" asked Richard.

"Of course," said Phoebe.

But suddenly a little nymphean panic overtook her. "It's time for father's wine. . . . I'll be late. . . . I must go now," she murmured. "Good-bye."

She turned Killdee's head, and set off at a canter.

"Good-bye . . . till tomorrow." Richard called after her.

It was *he*. . . . It was *he* . . . at last! . . . Could there be any doubt, when they were both young, and his hair was dark while hers was fair?—What a young prince, to come riding suddenly up to her out of the spring morning!—How kindly were the gods to set all the scene so prettily—blossoms, birds, a breeze of Eden, clouds like silver shells, a sky to match her own eyes!—And his eyes—so black, so masterful—how they had seemed to dive down within her, and touch a little nerve somewhere that was still thrilling sweetly. Oh, it was *he* beyond all manner of doubt!—They did not love yet, but love had touched them. The god had stood with a wing over the shoulders of each, and eyes full of gentle laughter, knowing well what they only dimly felt as yet. Oh, beautiful, delirious chance, that had brought her to Green Flower ford that morning! Yet it was not chance—she felt that she blasphemed—only loving fate, on sandals bound with roses, could have led her thither.

And what a rich voice *he* had, and what charmingly *different* hands from anyone else in the world!—And his mouth when he smiled—how wonderful! Those hands would touch her own some day—that mouth—she let the reins on "Killdee's" sagacious neck and hid her glowing face in her hands.—No more forever was the dread of old-maidhood to haunt her pillow—fairy marriage bells rang at her from every flower. She longed in that moment for a tangible God, that she might embrace his knees and kiss the hem of His garment. Tomorrow *he* was coming, bringing with him the wild honey of romance.

And Richard, riding home on Borak, now mincing

pettishly, her black chest specked with foam, was thinking:—

"What that little wood-nymph has to learn! To teach her—some things—would be diverting. Her face is a psychological contradiction. The eyes are like pretty nuns in blue habits, praying at their windows, while her mouth is like a laughing *amourcuse* in the street below. I shall tell her that some day. . . . It will be interesting to watch her expression and to hear what she will say,—that is, if she understands at all."

He did not mean to tell Sally of this encounter. He thought it unnecessary. It would only ruffle his mother and cause her to make fretful remarks. There would be quite time enough for such disclosures after he had been to Nelson's Gift. Then he could easily persuade his mother to call. He knew just the amount of sulkiness needed in himself to break down the sulkiness in her. One day of aloof and punctilious civility on his part and she would call at Nelson's Gift.

If he found this little wood-nymph really diverting on further acquaintance, it was better that he should see her quite frankly. One call from Sally, one from Phoebe,—then things would remain comfortably conventional, and he could drop in at Nelson's Gift whenever it amused him to do so. He knew beyond question that his mother and Phoebe would never be congenial. Those two visits would put things on a proper basis, and afterward it would be quite unnecessary that he should report to his mother every time that he saw Phoebe. She had such morbid ideas about his getting married too young and interfering with his genius. As if he had not reiterated to fatigue his absolute abhorrence of being bound in any way. He had even invented a saying once to soothe her, but which had only shocked without convincing. He had said to her during one of her anxious appeals to him not to marry until he was at least thirty-five:

"My dear mother, why worry?—I do not intend to marry at any age. The marriage-bed is the death-bed of art."

XI

RICHARD started for Nelson's Gift the next morning at nine o'clock. This unusual departure from his late routine called forth no comment on his mother's part—either verbal or mental, for Richard's days were always ordered or rather disordered by whim—the presiding deity of the eccentrically artistic.

He himself wondered if he might not be a little early, but then he reflected that for all her pure white cheeks Phoebe was yet a rustic maiden and probably rose early. He need have given himself no concern: she had been up and abroad, fresh as from a bath of dew, since the first bird piped in the lilacs under her window,—ready and sweetly palpitating with expectancy, like Eos in her dawn-hued robe of cloud, awaiting the bright rising of Orion. And Phoebe's frock, the prettiest she had, though old, might well have been woven of mauve clouds, so soft and dim was it from many washings. It was cut in the scant, short-waisted fashion of the year before, and girdled close under her young breast with a fold of the same filmy stuff. Around her throat, white and sweet as manna, she had, after much deliberation, fastened a thread of gold from which hung a tiny miniature of her mother set in amethysts. She wanted her mother's picture on her breast, this wonderful day, since she herself could not have that mother's breast to lean on. Besides, the amethysts went so prettily with her gown and the mauve ribbon which she had drawn through her sorrel hair.

Lily, the housemaid, Aunt Patty's blue-black daughter, came early to tell her that Mr. Nelson was suffering from a violent "crick" in his neck. She had given him his early cup of coffee, into which she put a tablespoonful of peach brandy, and then surrounding him with all the paraphernalia of research, and leaving a small silver bell beside him, joyfully descended to the little garden that had been specially laid out for her mother,—her own maiden for the rest of the paradisaical morning.

She took with her a copy of Tennyson and her mother's Bible. It was meet, she thought, that she should begin this day by reading a little in her mother's Bible.

Within a ring of dim blue hyacinths, in the grassy centre of the quaint plot with its borders of periwinkle, she

seated herself beside the little pedestal of old, mossy marble, crowned by a bronze basket, now blue with wild violets. Reverently she knelt, kissed the worn little volume that smelt of must and pressed flowers, and opened it at random. She opened at a place marked by a little gilt-edged card on which was a tiny coloured print of the sun rising yellow in a pink sky, and underneath some verses in diamond type. A pensive tenderness rushed over her. She went back, back as in a swing of flowers, to the days when she used to repeat these verses by heart, leaning on her mother's breast. She read the first one over now, holding her mother's picture to her lips as she did so.

"The morning bright, with rosy light,
Hath waked me from my sleep!
Father, I own, Thy care alone,
Thy little-one doth keep."

"Ah, I do want to be very, very good," thought Phoebe, sweet tears filling her eyes. "It's the only way I can thank God for giving me so much happiness."

She turned another leaf. Two rosebuds, once white, now a wan yellow, lay flattened within a piece of old-fashioned letter-paper. On this was inscribed, in a delicate, "running" hand, "Flowers from my little Phoebe's christening nosegay."

Phoebe kissed that, too, and the tears brimmed over. She was glad that she had never carefully examined her mother's Bible until today. All these touching mementoes were like messengers who spoke clearly in a still, small voice that seemed to come from heaven. She turned more pages, forgetting to read the sacred text in her absorption with words, to her, as sacred. Now it was a prayer she found. On the back of the sheet was written: "To be destroyed unread at my death."

"Ah, but she would want *me* to read it," thought Phoebe, and she unfolded the thin sheet.

"'Dear Heavenly Father,'" she read, "'I am very tired of well-doing, and my feet falter, and I faint by the wayside. Oh, give me strength to conquer, and to live so that I may bring up my precious baby to be Thy child. Fill me with noble and unselfish thoughts and purposes for her sake. Cast out of me all care for self. Let my dear husband and my little child have reason to be glad

that I have lived. Hedge up my way with thorns from all wrongdoing,—and keep my precious baby from evil in thought, word and deed all her life long. May she live to love and bless her mother,—and to serve Thee truly all the days of her life. Oh, keep her pure of heart so that she may one day see Thee. For Jesus' dear sake. Amen.'

"My sweet, darling mother," murmured the girl, now weeping outright. "I will always, always do as you would wish me to!" She folded the touching prayer and put it in her bosom. Then came an envelope in which Phoebe found her christening-ribbons, and a little marker printed with coloured crayons by her own chubby fingers when she was five years old. Then an orange blossom from her mother's bridal wreath, some little religious verses cut from weekly papers, and a packet of written records of her own childish sayings and doings. She read some of them, smiling now through her fast-drying tears:—

" 'My dear, droll baby said to me this morning, "Mother, do kitties hatch eggs? Well, where do they find their kitties? Do they fish for them?"

" 'Yesterday, just after Thomas had read morning prayers, she said to him: "Father, dear, I do *wish* you wouldn't pray so much about 'the lusts of the flesh.' "

" 'I sent her over Tuesday last to spend the day with Frances Macon's little girls and their cousins, and when she came back I said, "Phoebe, which of all your little friends do you love the best?" She thought a while, pulling her pretty gold curls through her mouth in a way she has, and then she said: "Well, I love Molly Page quite much, but her tears come too easily. I believe I love myself best, because my tears don't come so easily!" ' "

Phoebe broke into a little ripple of laughter over this last.

"Oh, what a vain little thing I was!" she reflected, then thought ruefully, "Perhaps I'm just as vain still. I was a whole hour dressing and doing my hair over and over this morning."

But as she recalled why it was that she had taken so long, and been so fastidious over her toilet, an April pink clouded her clear face to the temples. She closed the Bible again, having quite forgotten to read any of its scriptures, and, tying about it once more the piece of faded

ribbon which kept the flowers and slips of paper from falling out, hid it in a bed of irises nearby.

It was just as well. Nothing in the sacred volume would have suited her mood that morning except perhaps certain lovely lines from the less sensual portion of the Song of Songs, but this her father had particularly requested her never to read until she was a mature and wedded woman. How Phoebe would have adored them,—the immortal words in which love and spring come triumphing hand in hand: *"My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For lo! the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. The fig-tree putteth forth her green leaves, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."*

But, knowing nothing of the lovely and appropriate words which she had put away among the iris leaves, she opened her mother's little blue-and-silver "Tennyson" and began reading "Maud."

. . . "Birds in the High Hall garden calling,
Maud, Maud, Maud. . . ."

When she came to this, Phoebe let the book drop upon her knees.

"If only dear mother and father hadn't given me such a plain, old-fashioned name!" she thought regretfully. The "Phoebe-bird" might go on calling her name in the loveliest garden, but no one would ever think of making a poem out of it.—Here she heard a conversational "Caw," and, glancing up, saw that "Jimmy Toots," her tame crow, was progressing towards her down the garden path, in hops, punctuated by sly pauses. He cocked his head when she looked up, and fixed a sly, teasing eye of brass upon her.

"Go away, Jimmy Toots," said Phoebe severely. "I don't want you this morning."

"Caw!" he responded, unruffled, and fluttered straight to her shoulder, for he was an amiable if sardonic fowl.

"Oh, Jimmy Toots,—*go away!*" pleaded Phoebe, trying to take him down. "You're like a blot on a love-letter!"

But Jimmy clung with his strong claws to her shoulder, tickling her through the thin muslin, and rocking back and forth with spread wings to maintain his balance as she shrugged to dislodge him.

"Oh, you tiresome, tiresome old thing!" said Phoebe, laughing in spite of herself, but really vexed at what she felt to be the jarring note of the coal-black Jimmy in the fresh fairness of the morning. Had she been a pagan maiden, she would have offered a pair of milk-white doves, with coral feet and eyes, to Venus,—but what was one to do with a big, satanic crow that spoiled one's day dreams, and could only appropriately have been laid on the altar of Pluto?

And, of course, it was at this moment that Richard came into the garden.

Phoebe started to her feet, and Jimmy Toots, again whirring wild wings to keep his perch under this violent oscillation, beat down a strand of her bright hair. It netted his jetty breast as with a skein of flame, and Richard found delightful this picture of a young girl in an April garden, with a bird of ill omen on her shoulder.

"Don't take him down . . . please," he said, as Phoebe strove with both hands to pull "Jimmy" from his post, without tearing her frock.

"If it had been a ring-dove, all would have been spoiled," he added, cryptically enough to Phoebe's ears.

She stood quite still when he had spoken, leaving Jimmy conqueror—with her eyes showing in a blue line between her short, black lashes, gathered together as always when she smiled, and "two little blushes" in her clear cheeks like Mary of Ballylee.

"She is," thought Richard, "far better this way than on horseback. That clinging gown exactly suits her type. She is long and lissome like a Bottiecelli. Her hair, as well as her mouth, is the hair of a born *amoureuse*. And that crow is a master-touch. Wilde may say what he will;—Nature outdoes us all when she chooses to be artistic." Aloud he said:

"You with that crow are like a poem by Baudelaire."

Enchanted by being compared to a poem, though the name of Baudelaire was a mere musical sound to her, Phoebe laughed softly and said:

"I can't imagine a crow in a poem."

"'The Raven'?" suggested Richard indulgently.

"Oh, but a raven is different—there is something grim and strange about a raven, but a crow!——" she broke off and, laughing, quoted the old jingle:

" 'Stealing corn has been their trade,
Ever since the world was made.' "

"All the same," said Richard, "that crow against your wonderful hair strikes the sinister note that all beauty should have to be complete."

This was not only Greek to Phoebe, but Hebrew, Sanskrit, Choctaw. She smiled again, putting up her hand to touch "Jimmy Toots" quite gently, now that Richard had praised him, then suddenly, in response to Richard's look, which was again serious, almost brooding, she ceased to smile and gave him back his glance like a clear mirror, her eyes deepening and growing wistful.

Some lines of Baudelaire, whom the crow still kept in Richard's thought, occurred to him.

". . . des yeux obscurs, profonds et vastes,
Comme toi, Nuit immense, éclairés comme toi!
Leur feux sont ces pensers d'Amour, mêlé de Foi,
Qui petillent au fond, voluptueux ou chastes."

"I'm so sorry that father's ill today and won't be able to see you," said Phoebe, from sheer shyness, breaking a silence wonderful to her, wherein they seemed to be gazing at each other's very souls.

"Yes. . . . I am sorry, too," agreed Richard politely.

Here Jimmy Toots, who had been for some time eyeing the head of an amber hairpin that gleamed temptingly in the sunshine, made a skilful dab at it with his strong beak, and, withdrawing it triumphantly, fled as fast as he could with his clipped wing to the shelter of the lilacs.

Even in this thrilling hour, so great a favourite was the amber hairpin with Phoebe, that she made an instinctive dart after the bird, and in so doing struck the little volume of Tennyson into view from among the grasses.

Richard stooped and lifted it. He ranked Tennyson and Longfellow together, and of course she would read both poets. They were the pabulum of young girls.

"Don't you admire Tennyson?" asked Phoebe timidly, turning from her useless pursuit of Jimmy Toots.

"He's written axiomatically melodic lines," admitted Richard in concession to her charming naïveté. "I don't care for the celebrated 'moaning doves and murmuring bees' myself. I believe that the only two poems which

seem to me to have any spontaneous life in them he himself condemned as . . . er . . .'' He hesitated, searching in his mind for an adjective suited to express his meaning to a young girl. ''As too Swinburnian,'' he concluded.

Phoebe looked eagerly at the book whose leaves he was turning, then up at his lowered lids, then she said shyly:

''What are they? I wonder if I know them.''

''But you must, if you are so fond of Tennyson.''

Phoebe flushed a little.

''I don't read much poetry at a time,'' she said. ''I haven't read nearly all of that book. Only 'Maud' and the 'Idylls of the King,' and 'The May Queen,' and a few others.''

''You've never read 'Œnone' and 'Fatima'?''

''No,'' said Phoebe sadly. Here was she, disappointing the prince on the very first day that he had entered her garden. Wretched girl! she would read poetry by the hour, by the ell from this day forward.

Richard looked at her downcast face, and a sudden inspiration came to him, caused by the scientific curiosity of the psychological vivisector.

''If I may sit here on the grass beside you,'' he said, ''I will read them to you if you like.''

If she liked!—Phoebe looked at him with such a smile that words were not needed, and made room for him within the ring of hyacinths. Now he was so near her that she could note the fine grain of the skin on his temple, and get a whiff of the peaty scent from his coat of grey Scotch homespun.

''I shall only read you a few lines from 'Œnone,' '' he said, ''the whole is rather tiresome. But I'll give you all of 'Fatima'—it's rather charming.''

The extract from ''Œnone'' ended with the lines:

> *''Ah me, my mountain shepherd, that my arms*
> *Were wound about thee, and my hot lips prest*
> *Close, close to thine in that quick-falling dew*
> *Of fruitful kisses, thick as autumn rains*
> *Flash in the whirling pool of Simois.''*

To Phoebe it was almost as if Richard's lips brushed hers in the reading of those words. She did not flush, but grew even whiter than was the nature of her magnolia skin, and kept her eyes upon her clasped hands. The little pulse of

"'YOU ARE SUCH A WONDERFUL LISTENER'"—*Page 63*

her soft throat, that Richard had noted yesterday, beat very fast.

He just glanced at her and went on to "Fatima."

"Last night when some one spoke his name,
From my swift blood that went and came,
A thousand little shafts of flame
Were shivered in my narrow frame.
O love, O fire! once he drew
With one long kiss my whole soul through
My lips, as sunlight drinketh dew.

. . . . . .

Before he mounts the hill I know
He cometh quickly: from below
Sweet gales as from deep gardens blow—

(Richard's voice made the "deep gardens" seem *this* garden.)

Before him, striking on my brow.

. . . . . .

And, isled in sudden seas of light,
My heart, pierced through with fierce delight,
Bursts into blossoms in his sight."

When he looked at the girl this time her hands were quivering on her knee and her whole throat and face one soft wave of rose.

"Ah, little *amoureuse*," thought Richard, "what country duffer will clang out his 'ragtime' fancies on your sensitive chords?"

But he had no idea of playing "Paris" to Phoebe's "Œnone." How to change this mood only too easily evoked?—Young girls were dangerous things to tamper with, and Phoebe did not even stir his cool senses, only roused in him that inevitable and cruel curiosity of the initiate, as regards the promising neophyte.

"I write verse myself," he now said in a matter-of-fact voice, closing Tennyson and flinging him a yard away, as though putting such a banal poet at his proper distance. "You are such a wonderful listener—so *simpatica*—that I wonder if you would let me read you some of mine one day?"

If she would let him read some of his very own poetry to her!—That poetry which must be so much more wonderful than Tennyson's, or even Browning's, of which she had heard but had not read. "Oh, *would* you,—really?"

she said, and her parted lips stayed open, and the colour swept up again into her face.

Richard said that he would bring over his poems in a day or two if she would allow him, and he began telling her about "The Daughter of Ypocras."

"Oh," cried Phoebe, throbbing with the joy of finding that one atom, at least, of what must be his universal knowledge she shared with him. "*I* know!—I read all about it in 'Sir John Mandeville's Travels.' That must make a beautiful poem."

Richard was both astonished and pleased to hear of her acquaintance with his abstruse subject. When he told her that she was the only person among those he knew who had ever heard of the daughter of Ypocras her delight was lovely. Even Richard was touched by it. Something in his brittle, artificial nature stirred delicately.

"When she looks like that one has the most primitive desire to kiss her," he thought, amused at his own banality, as of a spring-bewitched Tom, Dick or Harry.

He went on to tell her that he was also sculptor and painter as well as poet and a look of awe came into her eyes;—it changed her from *amoureuse* to devotee, and made her still more appealing to Richard, whose nature craved adulation rather than love.

He did not wish to destroy this mood in her by more commonplace conversation, so he rose, saying that he feared he had kept her too long from her father, to whom he hoped that she would express his regrets. Just as he was going, Jimmy Toots emerged again from the lilacs and, flying to the bronze basket on the little pedestal, fixed him with an impish, half-veiled eye.

Richard paused.

"By the way," he said, "I must make a painting of you and that sardonic crow together—if you will let me."

"Of me . . . with Jimmy Toots?" said Phoebe doubtfully. She did not want the prince to paint her with so unromantic a fowl. She would have preferred to hold an armful of hyacinths,—those dim blue blossoms which would always mean Richard to her from this day until she died.

"Certainly—it will be unique," said he decisively. "But is 'Jimmy Toots' his name? It doesn't seem at all a fitting one to me. I shall always think of him as Charles Baudelaire."

He took off his hat gravely to the crow.

"*Au revoir,* M. Baudelaire," he said.

The crow fluffed out his sombre plumage, drew up one foot, then stretched it far out; opening his beak wide, he seemed to yawn derisively in Richard's face—then suddenly he flew again to Phoebe's shoulder.

"Caw! Caw!" he cried harshly.

"You two are wonderful together . . . wonderful," said Richard, with the enthusiasm that only art could rouse in him. "I shall call my painting '*Pandore et le Génie du Coffre.*' . . . There's something very French about you—the way your hair grows, perhaps." He indicated it with one of those leaflike gestures of his hand. "One can think of you in a '*hennin*'—with the white wimple flowing clearly over your burning hair, like——" He hesitated, seeking the appropriate simile, "like foam over flame. I won't delay. If you don't mind, I'll come tomorrow."

"No. . . . Come," said Phoebe softly.

Richard bent over her hand in the way that he had brought back from France, and kissed it. The kiss seemed to fly along her veins and print itself on her heart.

M. Jimmy Toots de Baudelaire cawed again,—very sullenly this time, and smacked his beak with a sound as of little shears being smartly closed.

XII

AFTER Richard had been for the second time to Nelson's Gift, he decided that his mother had better call immediately. He broke it to her thus:

"I've something rather agreeable to tell you, mother.—I know how you always worry in the end when you don't see your way to doing what Uncle Owen wishes, so I'll comfort your mind by telling you that I met Phoebe Nelson out riding the other day, and she's not at all the gushing miss—but a quiet, pleasant girl:—I think you'd really rather like her."

They were at breakfast in the West Portico, and he helped himself to a piece of butter while speaking, carefully lifting on it one of the nasturtium flowers with which it was adorned.—He always ate the blossoms with his butter. To devour colour, bloom and pungency all in one, he said, lifted the low necessity of eating to an æsthetic pleasure.

As his mother said nothing, merely busying herself with the old Sheffield coffee-urn, he continued, "Uncle Owen was right, too, in saying that she isn't beautiful,—but she has extraordinarily lovely colouring. It's like looking at a materialisation of the tints that float before me after gazing at masses of black and white."

Sally here made one of the tart remarks she rarely addressed to her son, but which she was noted for making to less-privileged mortals. "Your sense of colour, it seems to me, should be sufficiently stimulated by the mass of blacks and whites that your uncle has accumulated here at World's-End, without going farther afield, my dear Richard."

Richard received this gnat-bite upon the smooth, metallic surface of the humour in which he always encased himself when foreseeing a tilt with his parent. "It is singular," said he, "how a race afflicted with the horrible shades of muddy buff that specialise the skins of Caucasians should ever have been called 'white.'. . . One rarely sees a complexion that even approaches white. Phoebe Nelson" (he pronounced the name with deliberation) "has a really white complexion. At times it is like a pale camellia reflecting blood."

Sally gave the urn a sharp twitch of disgust. "What a horrid simile!" she exclaimed, "and at the breakfast-table, too. . . ."

"My dear mother," said Richard, "blood is a component part of the loveliest complexion—besides, even in itself, blood is a beautiful thing. I have often thought that Nero used his emerald at the circus. not to escape seeing the ruby pools in the arena, but to intensify his sense of crimson by the use of its complementary colour when he next looked with the naked eye."

"Richard! I beg of you," cried Sally, pushing back her chair, "the last morsel of roll that I was trying to swallow is nearly choking me."

She drank some gulps of the scalding coffee that she had just made, so hurriedly that tears came into her eyes, and she was obliged, despite her desire for cold dignity at that moment, to blow her nose.

"As you like,—I'm sorry," said Richard with his little air of indulgence, which, as fervently as she adored him, maddened the high-spirited Sally at times.

"Sometimes," she said bluntly, "you certainly talk non-

sense, Richard. It's clever nonsense, but it's nonsense all the same."

Richard smiled and bowed teasingly.

"Clever nonsense is a thing that Socrates would have taken off his laurels to," he said, unruffled.

"This girl," burst forth his mother sharply, not venturing to engage in a contest of wit with him, "you are going to bring her here, I suppose?"

"Why, no," said Richard. "I was thinking that if you went there it would please four people very much, at very little expense to your comfort."

"I see no necessity whatever for my driving five miles over abominable roads to call on a girl of sixteen."

"Twenty, on the first of May—so she told me yesterday. When you see her you will agree with me that May-day is the most appropriate in the calendar for her birthday."

"I wonder that the girl herself should wish it. It would be much more proper for *her* to call on *me*."

"As far as I can make out," said Richard, taking another nasturtium in his fingers and munching it delicately, "she is distinctly frightened by the idea. I imagine that she would receive you with much the emotions that the fair Rosamond received Queen Eleanor."

This made Sally very angry.

"I consider that comparison gratuitously and egregiously impertinent," she said, having recourse to pentasyllabics as one uses a charger's hoofs to crush an enemy too skilful with the cross-bow.

"I *beg* your pardon. . . ." said Richard with a look of real concern. Whatever affection he had was given to his mother, besides, he did not wish to antagonise her too much just now. "I am very, very sorry that you took my words in that way, mother. I didn't mean to anger you, of that you may be sure."

This was true in a sense, for, although he had thought a little delicate teasing would not be amiss, he had not desired to rouse actual wrath.

He got up suddenly and went round behind her chair. His rare kisses he kept in reserve for just such occasions, like magic bullets sure to reach the mark. Bending over, he now bestowed one lightly on his mother's hair. Her stiffness did not relax, but a slight red flew into her sallow cheeks.

"*Mater mea,*" said Richard softly, "I'm sorry. . . . Won't that do?"

Sally struggled for a moment, then her hand went up to his where it rested on her shoulder. She gave a catching sigh. Deep are even the slight wounds of an only son so avidly beloved.

"There are some things . . ." she began, then ended in another tone: "But there . . . since you're sorry."

Richard seated himself on the arm of the old Georgian chair.

"Really, mother," he said, "you have enchanting hair. As I look down on the lovely black and white web of it, I see in it the rarest hues—violet, emerald, almandin. . . ."

Sally laughed outright, and her ill-temper fled as quickly as it had come.

"An old woman with rainbow-coloured hair!—What a picture!"

"Rainbow-coloured hair would be beautiful with your eyes, mother," said Richard.

"If you praise my eyes, you praise your own, my boy," said she.

That Richard had her own eyes gave Sally an unending pleasure, secret and exquisite. It was like the seal of her motherhood upon him. The sign that made him hers in a way that no other woman could ever possess him.

"If," said Richard, with the sort of eighteenth-century gallantry that he used to her at times, and which he knew delighted her, "if the gods had asked me before birth what gift I would have from life, I should have replied 'my mother's eyes.'"

And bending over he kissed the slight, burnt-out looking hand with its soft, thin palm and nails a little too deeply curved at the matrix.

"To tell you the truth, Mother," he then said, choosing this propitious moment for frankness, with his usual acumen in dealing with her, "the girl promises me the rarest subject for a painting. She has for a pet a grim old crow, that perches on her shoulder. Her hair is like autumn leaves on fire, and to see that sin-black bird against it, so close to her fresh, naïve face. What do you think of doing her in a thin gold-tissue gown, and calling it '*Pandore et le Génie du Coffre*'?"

"The titles you choose are always beautiful, but I can scarcely tell about the picture until I have seen the girl."

This inadvertent admission did not escape Richard.

"That was just what I was thinking of," said he. "I want your opinion as always, and to give it, of course, you would have to see her. Besides, in a country neighbourhood like this, it's always best to feign conventionality—don't you think so?—If you called on Phoebe Nelson, my painting her would seem perfectly natural, and people wouldn't go devising some stupid romance."

"You see," admitted Sally reluctantly, "I didn't know that you thought of painting her."

"Then you'll be a gracious lady, and go?" asked Richard, kissing her hand again.

"Where your art is concerned, I put all personal feeling aside," replied his mother. "Yes, I will go. This afternoon?"

"That would be charming of you—then I could continue my painting tomorrow."

"Very well——" said Sally, "you might as well order the carriage now, so that John will not take out one of the bays this morning."

And, lighting a cigarette, Richard strolled off to the stables, well satisfied with what he had accomplished and the way in which he had accomplished it.

When he and Sally arrived at Nelson's Gift that afternoon there were guests already in the green-panelled room, and Phoebe was handing thin biscuits and Madeira.

As she saw Richard entering with his mother the little tray that she was carrying in one hand tilted and the wine-glasses ran together with a crisp tinkle. She put it down, and came forward with her shy grace. Her muslin frock was white today and she had pinned some hyacinths on her breast.

Sally saw at once that, as Richard had said, her colouring was lovely, but Phoebe's mouth displeased her.

The guests proved to be Phoebe's English friend who had lent her the pattern for her riding coat—a Mrs. Griggs—with a distant relative, Lady Agnes Tonks, and her son Harold, a youth of eighteen. Harold, it seemed, had developed a delicacy of the chest, and his mother was touring the world with him in search of the health required to continue his education at Oxford.

Lady Agnes,—who owed her title to the fact of being a daughter of the Marquess of Portingale,—the late Mr. Tonks having risen to opulence from the humbler sphere

of "trade,"—was small, slight, prettily rounded and as vivacious as a Frenchwoman.

Harold was a grey-eyed, large-mouthed lad, with a winning snub-nose freckled on the bridge and a delightful voice. Harold and Phoebe had become great friends during his stay. He thought her the nicest girl that he had ever seen.

They had been discussing the latest vagaries of Mr. Nigel Graham, the Scottish agent, when Richard and his mother entered, and now the subject was taken up again.

It seemed that Mr. Graham, on discovering that some of the Nelson's Gift cattle had strayed upon his farm through a gate inadvertently left open had turned cows and calves into the highroad.

"Most boorish, I call it. Fancy doin' a thing like that to a neighbour!" said Lady Agnes.

"Mr. Graham is not distinguished for his neighbourliness," remarked Mr. Nelson, not smiling this time, however

"The man's a regular curmudgeon," said Mrs. Griggs.

"I had to get on Killdee in the rain to help find them," Phoebe put in, "one of the poor little calves nearly died."

Here Harold, who had contained himself with difficulty until his elders expressed themselves, burst forth. He had a little difficulty with the letter "b" in speaking. He now said with considerable violence:

"That's the sort of b-bally b-bounder that we kick on the b-b-behind at Eton."

"Don't be coarse, sweetie," remonstrated Lady Agnes, just flicking him on the sleeve with one of her long, wash-leather gloves that she had drawn off when the wine and thin biscuits were served.

Young Harold became as red as a turkey-cock. It was a real blight upon his manhood, this dreadful habit of his mother's which he could not break, and which consisted of addressing him on the most untoward occasions by the nursery term of endearment, "sweetie."

But Lady Agnes, quite unconscious of her lapse—she had so often promised reformation and failed to accomplish it that her son had almost resigned hope,—now drew her chair up to Sally, who was seated by Mr. Nelson, and said in her clear staccato:

"I'm *so* enjoying this amazin' country of yours, Mrs. Bryce. These Virginia hills are sweetly pretty. Naturally

I dote on them, for they've brought my poor dear boy his health again."

"I am very glad," responded Sally a little stiffly, for she thought Lady Agnes's manner rather patronising. "It is not pleasant to have one's son ill."

"'Not pleasant.'. . . my word!" exclaimed her ladyship, using a provincialism of her own countryside which she thought rather fetching as employed by a daughter of Lord Portingale. "That's an odd way of puttin' it, to be sure. But then, you Americans are so delightfully unexpected."

Sally indulged her desire for tartness.

"Do you lump us all together like that?" she inquired mildly. "Chinese, Germans, Slavs, Irish?"

"Well," said Lady Agnes airily, "they all get the flavour, you know. It's like puttin' garlic in a pot-pourri—not that I mean to be uncomplimentary. You're a fascinatin' race—fascinatin'—so original. Now here, in this state,—'down South,' you call it, don't you?"

"We are rather in the habit of calling it Virginia," replied Sally, who was thoroughly vexed by this time.

"Ah, yes . . . quite so. . . . Dear old Thackeray—but I must say he wasn't a dab at givin' the local colour to other countries. Now, here, it strikes one, you know,—I'm sure you won't mind my mentionin' it, because I think it rather attractive—but really it does strike one—I mean the way that all the Virginians talk like niggers. I mean, you know—that it seems surprisin' that the whites shouldn't have got the black to talk like *them,* instead of talkin' like the blacks. Eh, what?"

Here Richard, anxious that this visit should pass smoothly, called out:

"Mother, do ask Miss Nelson to show you her garden and her crow."

Phoebe came up shyly. *His* mother! And such a commanding personage, to boot. It was rather overwhelming to be asked to show a crow, of all things, to such a stately being.

"I should love to . . . if you would care," she hesitated, lifting wistful eyes.

"I shall be charmed," said Sally with unusual graciousness, so delightful did it seem to her to be rid of the staccato arpeggios of Lady Agnes' running commentary on her native State and its inhabitants.

So Phoebe took Sally into her garden and to her, of all people, presented Jimmy Toots.

"Thank God, that is over!" said Sally with real feeling, as ten minutes later she was rolling again towards World's-End with Richard beside her. "That type of Englishwoman is more than I can endure patiently. If the 'belted earl,' her father, had trounced her soundly with the belt in her childhood—not removing the buckle—he *might* have taught her good manners. And the girl's father, an arrogant old pedant—— Fancy announcing on his own authority like that that the Chivalls and Cabells are one family! And that snub-nosed boy with his coarse vulgarities. Thank heaven that you went to an American school and an American college. . . ."

Richard felt it to be something gained that his mother had not yet excoriated poor Phoebe with that double-edged tongue of hers which had evidently been whetted by this visit.

"Didn't you think the contrast of that sinister crow with the girl's youth and colouring striking?"

"Almost too striking, Richard, to be quite frank. To me it seemed a most unpleasing combination. Shall you paint her mouth exactly as it is?"

"It's a unique mouth, isn't it?"

"To me," said Sally, "it is painfully bizarre. I was reading the other day in that book of Chinese translations from which you took your libretto,—and in one of the poems the lover compares a girl's lips to 'crimson caterpillars'—Phoebe Nelson's mouth is like that."

Sally could be deliberately malicious when she chose.

But Richard was not offended.

"'Crimson caterpillars!'. . . Charming!" said he. "I have always thought that the gracefulness of worms was not appreciated."

Sally gave it up.

XIII

NEXT morning, when Richard came, the garden was immaculate of the presence of young Tonks.

"Thank heaven," said he to Phoebe, "that Yorkshire pudding of a boy is not here today. He is like a young Bottom among your flowers, and he needs no mask to make him so.—His head is naturally the ass's."

"No, no," said Phoebe, smiling but loyal. "Harold is really a dear. I don't know what possessed him yesterday, but I gave him a good scolding after you went. I don't think he'll bother us again for some time." This last was said with perfect unconsciousness of its full meaning. "I can't think what got into him yesterday to be so sulky," she repeated.

Richard smiled at a pencil which he was sharpening.

"Can't you?" said he. "I can."

"Really?" asked Phoebe, curious. "What, then?"

"Why, the youth is over his big ears in love with you," replied Richard, blowing the pencil-dust delicately from its point, and looking straight at her.

"Oh, *no!*" she cried, blushing over all the milky skin that her frock left uncovered. To her the word "love" from *his* lips, even in this indirect way, set her pulses tingling. "He's only a little boy . . . almost a child."

"That's nothing," said Richard gravely. "When I was only a child of seven I was wildly in love with a friend of my mother's. When she used to lift me up among the perfumed laces at her breast I used to feel as though I would faint for joy."

"Oh! . . ." was all that Phoebe could manage,—this seemed to her so peculiar and sweetly confusing somehow.

"I used to look up at her beautiful mouth and ache because my own was so humiliatingly little. I used to imagine how, when I was a man, I would kiss those lips until I hurt them to make up for my own pain."

"Oh! . . ." said Phoebe again in a lower voice. Her colour came and went under his words, like a flag of rose and white shaken by the wind.

Richard, reflecting how sweetly facile she was to play upon, recalled an old legend,—Irish, was it? or German, perhaps—of a man who plays upon an enchanted harp that suddenly begins to make music of itself,—and through this music he discovers that the harp is really made out of a woman, and that in playing on its strings he has been playing with her lovely hair.

Such a harp, he thought, was Phoebe, made for the subtle delight of a rare artist. And looking at her with his slightly heavy black eyes, of which the irises were so large in proportion to the white, he mused on the fortunate chance which had sent her across his path, just as the creative mood in him was waning.

All the women who were drawn to him and his work, no matter how differing in type, gave off, under the stimulus of his fancies, a sort of pollen of the spirit which strangely fertilised the flower of his art. But never had he found so perfectly, so delicately responsive a temperament as this of Phoebe. One had but to touch her with a feather from the wings of love and she would flush and quicken. But the instrument was delicate and must not be touched too forcefully. Besides, he must reveal to her gradually his implacable aversion from all conventional forms of love —he must let her become indubitably aware that for him marriage did not represent a high ideal of consecrated affection, but the degrading severance from all freedom, the gyves with which the dead body of a convention is rivetted to the living spirit.

In this way he would protect both her and himself from the trying results of a young girl's worsted-work dream of a romantic affection ending in wedding-cake.

He smiled now as this last fancy occurred to him, and said:

"You may look at what I have done, if you like, this morning."

"Oh, I have longed so to see it!" she cried with kindling eyes. "May I look now?"

Richard nodded, and she came and stood beside him at the easel.

The drawing was a web of beautiful, flying lines. On a faint background of many Phoebes, the one pose that he had finally chosen stood out clear and vivid. He had perhaps exaggerated her likeness to a Botticelli, so that the head seemed a little small for the long, nymphean limbs, and he had more than suggested the pretty globes of her breast under the crimpled draperies. But the translation of Jimmy Toots into a bird of sombre presage was wholly a masterpiece. Far more than any serpent, he seemed fitted to whisper of honeyed sins in the ear of this virginal Eve-Pandore.

Richard waited a moment, then said, "Well?"

"Are my . . . am I quite as . . . as *long* as that?" asked "Pandore" at last, timidly. "It's beautiful, of course," she hurried on, "only I didn't know that . . ."

"The line from your girdle to your shoe-tip is one of the loveliest and most unusual I ever saw," said Richard reas-

suringly. "It is longer than in most women, but all the more exquisite for that."

Phoebe could hardly believe her own rose-flushed ears. There was then something about her that the prince thought "exquisite"!—Oh, magic April morning, forever blessed among all mornings,—day of days—— It was then exquisite to have long legs and a head like a little flower with foliage-hair!

"The head is much n-nieer than mine," she murmured, stammering in her delightful surprise.

"No," said Richard, "but I must ask you something. . . . You see, to balance the composition—those black wings tilting sharply to the right need something here. . . ." He made a swift curve in the air before the drawing with his pencil. "I think, if it won't be too much trouble, I'll get you to loosen your hair."

"Why, of course," said Phoebe happily, beginning to draw out the shining masses about her ears.

But Richard just touched her hand lightly. "No," he said again, "I don't mean loosen it in that way. I mean let it fall loose all about you."

For an instant even the submissive adulation of Phoebe was staggered. What would her father, and Aunt Patty, and the upright black Lily,—unexpected neighbours . . . what would they say,—were they to come and find her sitting to a young man in her garden, with her hair flying loose?

Then she thought, "How silly I am!—Hasn't he brought his mother to see me?—Of course he wouldn't ask me to do anything really improper." (Phoebe regulated her conduct by that old-fashioned word.) So she said again, "Why, of course," and began pulling out all the big amber pins that held her heavy locks in place.

As it tumbled down, a rippling, flashing sheet of flame and sunlight, the sight went a little to Richard's senses other than artistic. He had an almost uncontrollable impulse to plunge his hands into the fragrant mass.

"Astarte must have had hair like that," he said.

Phoebe, who didn't know who this lady might be, but who divined from Richard's tone that she must have had beautiful hair, smiled shyly, carding out the silken lengths with her fingers and looking askance at them.

"It's a dreadful trial in hot weather," she said.

Richard could not, or rather would not, resist his desire

longer. The touch of rare textures was one of his subtlest pleasures.

"May I?" he asked, extending his hand, and, as she did not answer, only went on smiling, not knowing quite what it was that he wanted, he lifted one of her tresses and pulled out its shining skein across his palm.

Phoebe quivered slightly, as though her hair had the antennæ-like quality of sensation. Part of her actually lay there in the hollow of his hand. Mysterious and lovely thought. And there, too, lay her heart, if he had only known it. And his heart? Ah, he would not touch her hair like that if his heart were not already hers as hers was his. . . .

He murmured some words in French:

". . . cette chevelure,
"Je la veux agiter dans l'air comme un mouchoir!"

Then he lifted his eyes to hers with the still, brooding look that she loved, and said softly:

"You have the hair of destiny, little Phoebe."

They had agreed only yesterday that being cousins after all they would call each other by their Christian names.

"How do you mean?" she faltered. It was so wonderful to have him speak her name. She no longer chafed at its plainness since he had said that it was charming. She repeated his words wonderingly, "The hair of destiny . . .?"

"The greatest women lovers in history and legend had hair like yours I feel sure,—Isolde, Guinevere, Luerezia, Francesca, La Vallière. It is the true 'Field of the Cloth of Gold' where kings meet, not to parley with one another, but with Eros,—he who is also called Pteros—the Flyer, because he comes and goes so swiftly."

He paused, and, as she looked up at him with deepened eyes but saying nothing, continued:

"Your eyes are very mysterious behind this veil of gold. You have religious eyes, dear Phoebe—but your mouth . . . shall I tell you what I said to myself about your mouth and eyes when I first saw them?"

"Yes. . . ." whispered the girl.

So he told her his simile of the nuns and the *amoureuse.* Phoebe, whose knowledge of French was only that of the average school-girl, thought that *amoureuse* was merely

the feminine of *"amour,"* which she knew meant "love," and so she said softly that she thought his idea beautiful.

"She hasn't an inkling of its real meaning," reflected Richard, and, vexed with the harp for failing this time to make music of its own under his subtle touch, he turned away suddenly, saying that he must begin to work.

After ten minutes at his easel, however, he came and lay upon the grass beside her.

"This lovely hair of yours," he said, just touching the curved ends that hung beside him, "is so marvellously alive that it seems to draw the vitality from the rest of my picture. I must stop a while and begin again from another point of view."

He rested his chin on his palm and lay looking at her quietly for a while.

"It seems strange," he said at last, "that you, who are the very spirit of youth, should be the child of an old man."

Phoebe, who had never thought of this, looked at him, startled. And she remembered that her mother, too, had not been young at the time of her marriage. What a sad, sad thought!—Her father and mother had never been young lovers . . . as she and Richard were.

"But I've heard that the most beautiful love often comes after marriage," she said, speaking her thought.

Richard smiled, playing with the ends of her hair. "My dear little Phoebe, love doesn't wait on lawyers and marriage-licenses, but takes whom it will, when, where and how it will. Indeed, marriage is love's bitterest enemy, not his gracious friend, as so many think."

"Love's enemy?" asked Phoebe, filled again with sadness, so poignant this time that it greyed the blueness of the sky. "Oh, how can that be?" she appealed to him.

"Tie a flower to a bar of iron and lay it before a slow fire—won't the flower wither?"

"No . . . no . . . it can't be like that!"

"But, Phoebe, dear, it is—I have seen too many marriages not to know."

The blue eyes above him grew black. They flashed wide and her lips trembled.

"It is not! It is not!" she cried. "The Brownings . . ."

"Oh, dear Phoebe," said Richard, letting himself drop all

his length upon the grass as though exhausted. "Spare me the Brownings!"

Phoebe was almost angry,—if she could have felt anger against *him*, she would have been in a downright temper. Her Brownings! Her sacrosanct ideals of wedded bliss! And to be asked to "spare" some one from them!

"You can't be in earnest," she said with a stiff dignity worthy of his mother.

"But I am, dear. My earnestness is deadly—as deadly as that picture of a divine passion thinned out for—fifteen years, I think it was,—like a condiment over the daily stale bread of wedlock. Phoebe," he lifted himself on his elbow and looked at her mutinous face with dark humour,—"the Brownings were guilty in my eyes of one of the worst crimes—they took a great passion by the nape and made it respectable."

In answer, Phoebe sprang to her feet and began twisting up her hair as though she were wringing out a wet cloth. Unmistakable now was the vivid anger in her eyes. She was, in fact, in what Aunt Patty was used to designate "a tantrum." Richard saw that he had smitten his living harp too sharply.

He pulled coaxingly at the hem of her mauve skirt, and Phoebe, enamoured though she was, actually said sharply,

"Don't! It's so old you'll tear it!"

"Are you *really* angry . . . with *me?*" asked Richard in a voice which he made tremble a little.

Phoebe stood still, with the look in her eyes of a hare that suddenly finds itself in a trap. She stopped twisting up her locks, and all at once tears shone between her lowered lashes.

Richard took the hand that hung near him very gently in his own.

"How are we to be real companions, Phoebe," he said, "unless you give me freedom to speak my real thoughts to you?" He added with that almost dæmonic acumen of his for the right note at the right moment, "I'd rather be lonely than bound in any way, Phoebe."

As she still continued silent he went on softly, "Perfect freedom . . . wide-winged liberty in thought, in love, in art—those are *my* ideals. If you tied your red-bird to your wrist with a cord, would you have any pleasure in it? —Do you think that it would love you better,—or continue to love you at all?" He just touched her fingers with his

lips. "All my life I have had this desperate love of freedom," he said. "Once when I was a child my mother tried to control me by tying me to a chair. It threw me into convulsions."

"Father tied me to a chair, too, once when I was little," murmured Phoebe in a low voice. "And I . . . I bit him. I was a very naughty child. I always had a dreadful temper. I . . . I am sorry."

"You see," said Richard in a casual tone, not wishing to underscore her repentance as it were by accepting it in words, "*my* ideal of great love is the loves of those who never tried to trim Love's wings as you've trimmed your crow's,—but who gladly went wherever his pinions bore them—laughing at the dull rubble-heap of broken laws. Laws," he continued musingly, "are never interesting until they are broken. Yes,—I had rather be lonely all my life than bound."

No one hated bondage more than Phoebe. This was a sentiment with which she could wholly sympathise. Oh, how free her love would leave him! Their marriage would not be the House of Bondage, as he feared, but that House of Fulfilment of which William Morris, her favourite poet, wrote so beautifully in "Love Is Enough."

The sweet lines sang in her mind.

> "Here is the House of fulfillment of craving,
> Here is the cup with the roses around it."

She smiled so prettily to herself that Richard said:

"Tell me what you are thinking of, Phoebe, dear."

But she shook her head with a look that showed him it would be useless to coax her, and for the moment he went back to his work.

XIV

APRIL was over. May had been two weeks with them, the Virginian May that is like the June of poets, with its roses and honeyed sunlight and sweet, impassioned clamouring of birds.

With April had gone Harold Tonks and his mother. Phoebe had been at Crewe Station to see them off, mounted on Killdee, with Richard and the flighty Borak curvetting feverishly beside her as the engine let off shrill

blasts of steam before starting. It had been some small consolation to young Harold to see how insecure was Richard's lanky seat on Borak.

"That piffler Bryce can't ride for nuts," he had told his mother as the train drew out. "A rippin' horsewoman like Phoebe is bound to tire of such a duffer in the end."

And, with this soothing thought in his mind and a kiss blown from Phoebe's dogskin glove, he was whirled away to Canada, an unwilling young Cœlebs in search of health.

With April had gone also Sally's first content with the beautiful isolation of World's-End. She was constitutionally idle, and, like most other idlers, craved the contact of her kind. Talking was so much the easiest occupation that she knew,—when day-dreams of Richard's future palled, as they would pall sometimes when lack of Richard's presence withdrew their proper nourishment. Moreover, Sally was beginning to be a little restive under his frequent visits to Nelson's Gift. Of course his painting was their incentive, but then one never knew. The spring played odd tricks with young people,—even with the aged, she had heard. How terrible, how disastrous it would be should Richard present her with Phoebe as a daughter-in-law!—Sally had never wished for a daughter. Indeed, she had never felt the need of any other child than Richard,—and a daughter-in-law. . . . The thought was under any circumstance disagreeable, but in connection with Phoebe Nelson! . . .

She had taken one of those strange aversions for the young girl which, in mothers, resemble the spontaneous hatred with which some women regard the stranger who afterwards becomes a rival. She felt, without acknowledging it fully to herself, that there was a strain in her son's nature to which that glowing mouth of Phoebe that she so disliked would appeal mightily,—should nature disarm him of his cynicism in some soft May moment.

She was beginning to be sure that she had acted very stupidly in not asking the girl to World's-End as Owen had wished,—then this absorbing painting of "*Pandore et le Génie du Coffre*" would have been done in the old terraced garden under her own eye. Even when she had not been present, she could have seen them from her windows. There was nothing like a garden in view of the front windows for checking undue sentiment in the young. Now, at that tumble-down, picturesque old place, Nelson's Gift, the

garden was tucked away in tangled shrubbery, like a rose in a light-o'-love's hair. Old Mr. Nelson was more or less of an invalid—he would never sit out of doors with them, or think of the healthy diversion of afternoon tea, or so much as dream of hobbling to a window to see what was going on.

Sally wrote to both Owen and Mary, asking them for heaven's sake to try to be at World's-End by June at least, instead of waiting for July; that Richard was wholly absorbed in his art and that she feared a nervous breakdown from sheer loneliness.

In the meantime "*Pandore et le Génie du Coffre*" was progressing famously. Even old Mr. Nelson had limped into the garden once or twice to note its progress. When regarding it he confessed with winning frankness that, though the idea was certainly original, he considered his living Phoebe far prettier than Richard's "*Pandore,*" and remarked that a yellow shift seemed to him an odd garment in which to represent a Greek maiden; that, indeed, if his memory did not fail him, yellow had been worn as mourning by the Hellenes.

And really, so delicious did Phoebe look in the slim robe of golden tissue alluded to by Mr. Nelson as a "yellow shift," with her white, white arms shining through the delicate stuff and her loosened hair making its gold seem tarnished,—that Richard had come again and again to congratulate himself on the congenital coldness of his temperament.

"Any other man would have kissed that mouth and forgotten to paint it long ago," he thought,—and oddly enough this self-congratulatory thought had at the same moment roused in him a stinging desire to taste those lips himself, if only for a fleeting instant. And it was the dread of interfering with his art, not even a passing thought of consideration for Phoebe, that restrained him.

As for Phoebe, her love for Richard was grown to such a pass that she could not think of him as a separately distinct entity. He seemed in some strangely beautiful way to be herself, and she him. She would have liked him to be something rarer, nearer, more mystically knitted to her than a lover.—She would have liked to think that a blazing star had been born somewhere in space, and that out of one half God had created her, and out of one half Richard, and that their love would fuse them into one blazing star

again. But it was only the heart in her that was a poet and not the mind, so that she could only thrill with those lovely emotions, not put them into words even for herself. In that deep heart she held Richard as a still pool holds the sky, its clouds, its lightnings and its stars. All of Richard's moods, dark or fair, were dear to her, and to his wild theories she had grown accustomed. It would all be well one day, when he took her in his arms—then he would see the truth of love, and that truth would make him free as he had never been before even in his fondest dreams of freedom; while the blazing star of their united love would light his path forever and all shadows would flee away.

One late afternoon a sudden thunderstorm kept him at Nelson's Gift for the night. It seemed a sort of cloudburst; fences were swept away, cattle drowned, the Green-Flower became an ugly torrent impossible to ford. Then, about nine o'clock, a southwest wind sprang up, the clouds were herded over the mountains, stars began to glimmer, and presently the soft, clear shoulder of a naked moon slipped over the horizon. But the thrumming of the once placid brook, now a ruddy cataract, at the foot of the garden told what the larger streams must be, so all thought of returning to World's-End that night was put aside, and Richard, in one of the sporadic bursts of amiability which overtook him through life, sat down to a game of chess with Mr. Nelson.

Phoebe had some yards of soft white stuff to hem for a little frock that she was making. She came and sat near them with her work, under the soft light of an oil lamp, and the grey kitten, the only child of its tortoise-shell mother, jumped thistle-footed into her lap and daintily made a nest for itself among the soft folds.

As Phoebe sat there, still as a white mouse so as not to disturb the chess-players,—with her pretty hand flying regularly out at intervals, followed by the obedient thread, and capped by the worn gold thimble which had been her mother's, she was thinking:

"Some day we shall sit like this in our own home, and I shall be sewing on something for Richard." This thrilling fancy so moved her that she let her energetic little hand rest on the grey kitten for a moment, while her lips parted and her eyes grew dark and vague.

Richard, glancing up from the game, which he played

well and had difficulty in arranging so that Mr. Nelson should seem to win by skill and not by the sheer stupidity of his opponent, noted this look, and thought to himself:—

"That child is as passionate as a Sicilian. It would take skill and coolness to play with that flame without burning oneself."

Phoebe's eyes happened to meet his gazing at her. Her lips parted. Her spirit seemed to flow from them with her breath and touch him like perfume. He shivered slightly. It was odd, but Phoebe certainly moved him against his will at times. Yet it was pleasant, too, and for him, of course, there was no danger.

"Phoebe, my dear," said her father. "There is a strong draught from that window. I feel it myself, and Mr. Bryce shivered just then."

Richard turned his attention to his queen, who was in check, and Phoebe rose silently and closed the window, shutting out the rain-quickened scent of honeysuckle and damask roses.

When prayers were over and Mr. Nelson had said good night, Phoebe handed Richard his bedroom candle in an old silver candlestick with snuffers neatly laid beside it.

"Your room is there," she said, pointing upwards, as they stood together in the quaint octagon hall. "Just at the head of the stairs, to your left. I sleep down here so as to be near Father, because the servants stay in 'the quarters' at night. If you want anything, will you please call me and not father? When he's waked at night he can't go to sleep again. That is my room, on the right, the one with the fan-light over the door."

"Thank you," said Richard, taking the candle, "but I'm sure I shan't need anything. Hark! What a wind!"

"Yes. And hear the brook. It sounds like muffled drums."

A window shutter crashed to. There was a tinkle of falling glass.

"Oh! dear—I must run to see to the windows," cried Phoebe.

All night long the great wind, coming whence and blowing whither no man knew, beat with its soft, wild pinions against the aged house. The staunch walls thrilled with its impact, and now and then a timber creaked as in a buffetted ship. High above, down steeps of black-blue air, a frantic

moon fled through the tattered wrack. Now Richard's whitewashed walls shone like a bleached shell with her livid radiance, now became dim again. He turned and turned uneasily on the old-time bed with its mattress of hair laid upon plump billows of goose-down. Though he had opened both windows wide and fastened back the Venetian blinds, the warm air that had gathered all day beneath the low roof was not dispelled by the outer burly. A strong smell of brown Windsor soap filled the room. Suddenly he felt as though he were smothering. He got up and went to the window, leaning far out, so that the wind played roughly with his sleek hair. And the sight from this window was so lovely that he drew up a chair and sat there gazing at it.

Below him lay Phoebe's garden, now sprayed with the flying foam of rose-petals;—beyond the soft, breastlike pasture lands, all bathed in moonlight; beyond these Hollybrook Wood, its drenched foliage tossing silver plumes in the warm, wild wind that was like Sirocco.

But it was the garden and the untrimmed lawns around it, with their clusters of guelder rose-shrubs, like girls in white gowns crouching from the blast, that seemed to him enchanting.

What a night to sit in a stuffy room filled with the odour of brown Windsor soap!

Now the wind seemed lulling. It came in languid ripples all sweet with scents of rain-washed earth and flowers. Suddenly a mocking-bird, bewitched by that white moon, began its song of wanton ecstacy.

Richard started up as though the bird had called to him, and flung on his clothes. He could not stand it another moment. He would go out into this night so evidently created for poets and lovers and the free souls of winged things. He looked at his watch in the moonlight. Three o'clock!—he must have dozed a little, after all. In two hours the dawn would break.

He went cautiously down the old staircase, stopping and listening when a step creaked under his tread,—but nothing stirred. Somewhere in the hall below a mouse had got hold of some little hard object, one of Phoebe's spools, probably, and rattled it against the wainscotting. Rattle, rattle . . . silence. Rattle, rattle . . . silence. He stole on, past Phoebe's door, having in his mind a picture of a young girl sleeping daintily between the heavy goldwork

of two long braids. Another moment and he was outside, in the splendid vacancies of the night.

Here, too, all was utter silence save for the thrumming rush of the brook at the hill's foot, and the *tank-tonk* of a cow-bell in a distant pasture. The mocking-bird paused for an instant. Richard trod on mats of rose-leaves, and was forced to step aside here and there because of great acacia boughs which had been blown down. And again the fierce, soft wind rose from its crouching, and quickened the moonlit garden with its breath.

And Richard thought of Phoebe, daintily sleeping between her golden braids, and of how she would exult in such a night.

He glanced towards her window above the low hedge of lilacs, and saw that it had become a dim, yellowish square in the grey wall. Then she too was awake. How wonderful it would be to mix the music of that living harp with the soft wildness of a night like this!—He went close to the window and looked up. Something stirred softly within, like a bird stirring the foliage among which it rests. Then a slight shadow passed between him and the white curtains.

Richard pressed in among the wet lilac-leaves and put his hand on the sill of the window. "Phoebe!" he said softly, "Phoebe!"

All was still, then a low voice, very startled, said:

"Richard! . . . Is it you?"

"Yes, Phoebe, dear. The night is so wonderful and it will soon be day now. Come to your window and see how wonderful it is."

Stillness again, a long pause, then Phoebe's hand drew back the curtains, and he saw her face, very small and childish in the moonlight under the dark gold of her hair, parted and braided for the night as he had fancied.

"Look," he said, sweeping his hand towards the moon-enchanted garden, "there is white-magic at its whitest and most magical. . . . How shameful to sleep through it! . . ." He pointed towards the great moon. "There she is . . . the real Circe in all her splendour, and men sleep at her feet like cosy swine. Come out, Phoebe! Come out into this wonder. Let us do homage to Selene in the wild dawn like two Greeks of old."

"But," said Phoebe, hesitating softly, "the dawn has not come yet, Richard. It would seem so . . ."

"Ah, Phoebe, dear," he pleaded, "are you going to let old stepdame convention rob you of this marvellous hour? —See, dear, it must be nearly four o'clock. Look at your watch. . . . One hour till dawn . . . one lovely, unique hour . . . together. The rain is so warm and fragrant on the grass that it can't harm you. . . . You will be like a wood-nymph walking through the dew to whiten her slim feet. Come, Phoebe! Ah, come. . . . You are above such silly Grundyisms. . . ."

And still Phoebe hesitated, holding the curtains shyly before her figure in its white nightdress.

"Phoebe," said Richard in a low voice full of wounded reproach, "can it be that you don't trust me?"

Then Phoebe turned quickly, dropping the thin curtains, which blew gently inward, as though following her retreating form, and he heard her voice, just audible, saying:—

"Wait. . . . I'll slip something on and be with you in a little while."

"I could lift you out through the window," said Richard softly, but he got no answer to this suggestion.

In a few minutes she came stealing through the front door,—like a shy ghost stealing towards dawn—from the old house that it has prettily haunted through the night. Her hair was now unbraided and pinned up loosely about her head.

A soft gown of white wash-silk fell in straight folds to her feet and she had put on little Chinese sandals of straw so as not to spoil her prettiest slippers with the wet.

Richard went to meet her and took her hand to lead her down the shallow steps.

"You look quite the Greek girl, Phoebe," he said, smiling, "only I would rather that your hair were free."

The wind, as if agreeing with him, here caught a handful of the loose masses and tossed it out about her face.

Richard helped her gather it up again.

"How lovely you are in the moonlight," he said as he did so, "you are like a moon-maiden yourself,—a hand-maiden of Selene slipped down to play for a white hour with the children of men. How do you like our earth, little moon-maid? Has she not a fragrant breath?"

They had walked on hand in hand, towards the Greek temple of white stucco called "the Venus temple," which overlooked her garden. All at once he dropped her hand and stood looking at her.

"Yes, I must paint you so," he said. "Psyche wandering after Eros left her. That little temple will compose beautifully with the rounded shrubs." He took her hand again.

"Let us see what offering the storm has brought to Venus."

A delicate exultation filled him. This was a rare adventure, suited to the subtle, semi-sensuous, semi-spiritual humour of a poet-artist in the twentieth century. He thought, with a smile, of the uncomplex childishness of the Greek imagination which had pictured wood-nymphs as pursued by Satyrs, Fauns and gods of fleshly form descending in gold chariots from a marble heaven. Not even an inkling had those worthies of the possibilities of exquisite mental voluptuousness. How crass was the average man's dream of pleasant indulgence!—He felt that, unique as were the night and the circumstance, he himself was even more unique. And he wondered how the delicate spell was working in the mind of the girl who walked so gently beside him, her face a little bent towards the earth, like the faces of the flowers about her, heavy with rain.

But Phoebe's thoughts were only the thoughts of countless other maidens who had walked with their lovers through the still heart of a moonlit night.

"He—I—together . . . only we two, in the wonderful night—together. He—I—— Will it ever change? . . . Could it ever change? . . .

"It would be better to die now . . . he and I . . . alone together before anything less beautiful might happen."

They reached the little temple and looked in. On the wet flags lay a drift of rose leaves and among them a great white butterfly, its pale wings pasted to the dark stones.

"Look, Phoebe," said Richard, bending over it, "look what a poem nature has created for us!—Here lies Psyche—dead in the temple of Venus."

"Ah, poor little thing," breathed Phoebe softly. "It seems strange that it should take a great storm to kill a butterfly."

"The soul dies hard, they say," mused Richard. "And Venus is very cruel—she sent the storm, of course. Stay like that!" he exclaimed, breaking off. "Now I have my picture! *Psyche Pleurant son emblême dans le Temple de Venus. . . .*"

But no sooner had he uttered these words than even

Richard became aware of the drolly artificial note struck by the French language thus spoken in the rustic sweetness of that wild Virginian night.

As if in especial derision of his mistake, the sweet song of mockery broke forth again.

They stood silent, listening, and for a moment Richard's heart became simple within him. He gazed at the pale, absorbed profile of the girl beside him and thought: "How lovable she is!—If I were an ordinary man I should have lost my heart to her long ago."

A puff of wind blew her hair across his face. It was sweet as clover with her own young fragrance. As Richard withdrew its silken clinging from his mouth his hand shook slightly. It would be . . . unique to kiss those parted lips—lightly, delicately in this strange hour.

Phoebe turned to him as though he had spoken.

"Phoebe . . ." he murmured. He still held her hair in his hand. He drew her gently towards him by the soft mesh. Now she was very close. The warm fragrance of her breath mingled in his nostrils with the scent of her rich hair,—and sweetly, yieldingly, she followed the chain made of her own tresses by which he drew her to him. When she was close enough he lifted the long strands and wound them about his own throat. Their faces were very near together now, held by that link of living gold.

"Phoebe," he whispered, his breath becoming her breath. She trembled from head to foot, but stood quite still, and her dark, rapt eyes were fixed in his.

"Phoebe," he said again, and now his mouth brushed hers. Under that faint touch, light and sharp as flame, the girl seemed to slip downward like water through his arms. He caught and stayed her,—his quickened heart sending the blood in hot beats against his ears and eyes. And at the contact of that young body, so soft, so pliant, a sudden gust of overwhelming passion, wilder than the wild wind, seized and rocked him;—a gust of passion, cruel and relentless as are ever the rarely roused passions of the habitually cold. The egoist in him ravened and must be fed at any cost to anyone. Bending his head he kissed her on the lips,—holding her to him until he felt her young breasts beat against his like scared birds.

To Phoebe in her inexperience of love, though deliciously startled, this seemed only a natural phase of the wonderful overwhelmingness of which she had dreamed. Here was

her master, her conqueror, and though these strange kisses bruised her lips, it was fitting that a lover's caresses should be different from all others, even to the point of pain. She did not struggle, but hung trembling and panting in his arms, her eyes dark and dim under her drooped lids, like those of a carrier pigeon that has flown too far and fast. Endless seemed those mad caresses, endless the sweet, dizzying tumult of her heart. It was as though life were failing her—as though the earth were but a shaken branch of flowers beneath her feet. A fiercely sweet, confusing music seemed throbbing all about her, trancing her, numbing her senses too sharply tuned.

XV

IN those days Phoebe was a primitive and a pagan. That God was love seemed to her a statement that swept dogma aside in its vast comprehension of all possible emergencies of the soul. That she kept her room, and did not see Richard before his departure on the day after the storm, was but the shyness of the bride, while the past night floated in sweet, confused glimpses through her fancy. She was Richard's bride. Of course, she knew that in the eyes of men the wonderful wild sweetness of that moonlit hour would seem a sin, but in the eyes of God she was sure that she was Richard's bride.

Richard rode away early the next morning and did not come to Nelson's Gift the following day. He sent a messenger to Phoebe instead, with a little box of moss-jade in which was a pretty circlet for her hair, formed of crysoprase set in old silver. On the slip of paper which lay with it in the box was written, in French—"For the most beautiful hair in the world, with my homage." (This "*homages*" was a subtle touch under the circumstances, he had considered, and would surely please her.) "Unexpected business calls me to New York this evening. I am desolate, but it is absolutely necessary for me to go."

He had written in French for two reasons, one that it was easier to write impersonally in that language; the other that in case any one else opened the box by mistake they would not understand the message and Phoebe could translate as she chose. Mr. Nelson had once volunteered the information that he knew German, but not French.

When Phoebe read these words she went as white as the paper on which they were written, and a doubt, dreadful and sickening as the first pang of a mortal illness, swept over her. She trembled, and caught the table edge for support, gazing down at the gems which seemed to stare back at her, cold and cynical as the eyes of little vipers.

He was going away. . . . Going away like that, without a parting look or word. . . . And he sent her jewels and words in French which he had not even begun with her name or signed with his. . . . Then, so terrible was the anguish of this doubt, that she tore it from her heart with all the strength of her passionate young will. Of course, Richard was true, they would be married soon before men, as they had already been married before God. Only something dreadful could have called him from her at this time. . . . And she wondered what might have happened to make his presence in New York vitally imperative. Perhaps Cousin Owen had died suddenly. . . . How sad that would be. She was so fond of him. But no, she felt that Richard would have mentioned it if that had been the cause of his sudden departure. On her knees by her bed, there alone in her room with the door locked, she spread out the sheet of paper and read over and over the French words, as one starving chews desperately on splinters of dry wood. "Désolé," that meant "desolate," grief-stricken. She had no knowledge of any trumpery, conventional significance for the word. He was "desolate" because he had to leave her, but then why, why such a short message? Why write it in French that he knew she only imperfectly understood?

Somehow his gift of jewels made her shrink with a sick distaste, which she could not account for. If he had only sent her a rose that he had kissed. If he had only written her name and used one of the simple words that lovers love—"dearest"—"darling." . . . And again that doubt, like a shaft with poisoned tip, struck through her heart. What if . . . but so horrible was this "if" that Phoebe lashed herself with other scorpions to dull the pain of its sharp bite. She it was who was disloyal to Richard in her thoughts. She was the offender, guilty of *"lèse majesté"* towards her Prince, her King . . . but not to come for one parting word, one good-bye kiss. . . . Oh, there was nothing, nothing in all the world of chance that could have kept her from him at such a time had she been in his

place! And once more that wild "will to believe" brought her up out of the submerging doubt which had again swept over her.

Suddenly a new pang assailed her,—he had not even sent her his address in New York. She gazed about her with hot eyes. Every object in the pretty room, so sweetly familiar, had grown strange and sinister, even menacing. The calm May morning, sparkling so freshly, seemed to glare at her with hard, intrusive aloofness.

She got up dully and locked the circlet away in her chest of drawers, then, surprised by a sudden convulsion of weeping, sank down and lay with her forehead against the bare boards, sobbing until her breast ached with the violent spasms.

Meanwhile, Richard's state of mind was not enviable. Until now his superfine senses had been as wine at dainty feasts of life. What was this heady torrent that had overwhelmed him, not blandly awaiting his delicate sips in pretty glasses, but rushing, wild and frothy like the vintages in legend, which some sorcerer strikes from the dry rock to enliven a festival?

Besides . . . and here Richard stood quite still, and his black eyes, brooding on disastrous possibilities, grew dense and velvety as soot in their opaqueness. Phoebe might even be dreaming of marriage, in spite of all that he had told her concerning his abhorrence of that tie. Young girls were like that. No, he must certainly get away. These disturbing fires, deprived of all fuel, would die down after a few days of absence. His sudden departure could be easily explained to his mother. His art called him—necessary studies for the Chinese opera, which he had so neglected of late. Then, too, his mother had never liked Phoebe. She would find such satisfaction in the cessation of his visits to Nelson's Gift that she would easily reconcile herself to his departure.

How then to deal with Phoebe? All must be gradual. He felt that an infinitely graded toning off of his relations with her was the wisest course. A certain thrifty shrewdness showed him at once that nothing positively must be committed to paper. After some hours of deep cogitation he had thought of the circlet of crysoprase in his collection of old jewels, and the accompanying note in French. But then, from New York she would certainly expect love-letters. This complication worried him gravely for some

time, but suddenly the riddle solved itself, as it were. He would send her, at intervals not sufficiently far apart to alarm her, bits of his love-poems, which she had not seen. He would alter them slightly—no, slightly would not do—for Richard was amorously expansive on paper—but revised carefully they would be admirable substitutes for love-letters and wholly uncompromising.

With his mental house in this neat order, he went to New York.

Two days later Phoebe received what she believed to be her first real love-letter . . . and from *him!*

Cold and startling as a little snake, where a rose has been looked for, the first "revised" poem slipped from the envelope that she had warmed with kisses. Poor Phoebe! Her impulse was to burst into tears—but conquering this desire, which she felt to be childish and unreasonable when Richard had, of course, thought to please her more by a poem than by a mere, ordinary letter, she set herself to master its meaning. She was pathetically like a child at a task too difficult. There, in the little "Venus temple" where together they had found the great, white butterfly broken on the wet flags, she tried to get some glow from the crisp, gem-like words set in a strange, harsh form. As if to make it all the more aloof and peculiar, the verses were in French—very idiomatic—Richard was excessively vain of his French.

Phoebe, the suppressed tears making her throat ache, translated, with the help of a little dictionary for which she had to return to the house, words which signified, as well as she could gather, that:

"Thou, my crumb, hast green eyes and hair of tortured gold." [She knew so little French that she read "*ma mie*" literally, and it seemed indeed a strange term of endearment to her sore mood.] "Hadst thou eyes tormenting and golden and hair of green, I could love thee with another love, more subtle and delicately venomous. Nothing is more beautiful than a wounded love. I would strike blood from thy bird-like breast and drink it like sweetly poisonous wine. Lovely art thou, my crumb, and if thou hadst eyes of gold and hair of crysoprase, I could not love thee more cruelly but I would love thee with a subtler love."

After she had mastered this, Phoebe had a moment of despair in which she wept, at last, as passionately as on the

day of his departure. She had dreamed all those forty-eight hours of going to sleep some night with a letter beginning "My own Darling" close against her heart.

Valiant had been her fight during those two interminable days against that dreadful doubt which from time to time stabbed her. But now it was back upon her like a vulture, clinging and tearing with claws and beak, smiting her with great black pinions.

Not, however, until a fourth of those strange, epistolary poems reached her did she suffer the assault of shame. When this fourth copy of French verse lay open in her hands she did not even try to read it, but, flinging herself upon her bed, lay still as death, her hands crushed against her eyes. And shame, like a great vampire, came and spread its heavy, noisesome bulk upon her, covering her from head to foot—sucking her strength, sucking, as it were, her very life. This shame was so horrible that she loathed her own body lying there and the touch of her hands upon her eyes. She longed to strip it from her like a soiled garment, to be loosed on the wide clean winds, and, mingling with them, be freed from herself forever.

No tears came now. Shame scorches and withers. It has no flood-gates like kindly grief. And lying there, her fingers causing bright spangles to swim on the red darkness of her eyelids, Phoebe thought of the day that Richard had first come to World's-End, and of how she had gone early to her mother's garden to read in her worn Bible. Over and over the words came back to her—over and over, over and over, "Keep my precious baby from evil . . . keep her pure in thought, word and deed so that she may one day see Thee." She struck herself on both cheeks. "It is well that my mother died before I grew up."

Then came reaction, and her love for Richard, rushing like an eager up some still, sluggish river, swept her far out on the tide of desolate longing. Though she burnt with mortification as she wrote them, she could not, even now, refrain from sending occasionally one of the little notes so piteously simple, which he never answered save indirectly by those artificial poems that she had come to hate. She grew so pinched that her father prescribed a tonic before breakfast.

Then one morning, while Phoebe, sweetly obedient in spite of her great trouble, was lifting this mixture to her

lips, Fortuna in her grimmest aspect came and laid a heavy hand upon her shoulder. So intense was the faint sickness that overpowered her that she sank to her knees where she stood before her dressing table, and the pale red stuff in the glass was spilt over her night-gown.

"What is it? What is it?" she thought, feeling blindly about her for some support. "Is it death?"

She managed to drag herself to her feet after a few moments. but only to be crushed down again by that deadly nausea. Crawling little by little to her bed, she lay there in a half stupor until Lily, who had twice rung the little gong for breakfast, came to see what could be the matter.

Lily bathed her face with cologne-water and tried to get her to drink some coffee, but it was useless . . . she could not swallow.

She hoped that she might be going to die, and lay still and helpless, feeling that she could love God again if he would only let her die. But by one o'clock, after she had drunk a bowl of Aunt Patty's good chicken-broth to please her father, who had come and sat at her bed-side and touchingly fed her from the spoon as though she were a little tot again . . . she felt so much better that she dressed and went downstairs.

It must have been, she thought, the taste of the calisaya bark which was so bitter, and the smell of the nutmeg which dear father *would* grate over the mixture, though she disliked it so much. And she sighed wearily, thinking how she had loved life only seven short weeks ago, and how death now seemed to her the safest refuge.

But next morning again she was deathly sick.

Mr. Nelson was so troubled that he wished to send for their friend, Dr. Patton, but Phoebe pleaded so earnestly, that, fearing to excite her unduly, he said, "well . . . well, Puss," and went off downstairs, his carpet-slippers slapping gently on each bare step.

Although this horrid faint sickness continued to make her first waking a time of dread, the afternoons brought such complete respite that Phoebe thought she must be having a sort of belated "spring attack," and convinced her father of this theory, so that Dr. Patton was not sent for.

It was not until a week later, that during a visit to Mrs.

Ladd, the recipient of Mary's gift of silk-scraps, the real horror of her situation was revealed to her.

She had been telling that sympathetic soul of the dreadful way she felt every morning, and Jane Ladd had said: "Poor lamb. That cert'n'ly is a shame. It sounds zackly ez if you was a married lady! Why my gal Louizy, she's a-carryin' her eighth an' the sickness she do hev ev'y mornin', same as you, is enough to make a rhinosserer cry for pity!—Yo' sickness sounds jes like that sickness, Miss Phoebe, honey. It cert'n'ly do seem a shame ez you should go through with it for nothin'."

Then it was that the world went black to Phoebe, and only by setting her teeth sharply in her hand, while pretending to lean her face upon it, had she kept herself from fainting.

That night, putting aside all pride, in her frantic terror and distress she had written the following letter to Richard.

"Dear, dear Richard—for God's sake come to me. It is a matter of life and death. Oh! my own dear Richard. You *must* come to me and at once. Don't torture me by asking me to make my meaning clearer. Only come, *come*, dear Richard, come quickly, for Christ's sake.

"Your

PHOEBE."

XVI

RICHARD was in Newport when he received this letter, and, as he breakfasted by his bedroom window, he could hear the strains of the "Tango" played by the band of the Casino not far away.

The man had brought his letters on the same tray with the hot-house grapes, toast and coffee that always composed his morning meal. There was a letter from his mother with the nag's head in silver on the square envelope, some bills, and Phoebe's little narrow, blue-grey missive.

Richard lit a cigarette before reading it. When he had done so, his thoughts came in words, quick and plain, like the thoughts of an everyday man.

"God! I hadn't thought of that .... What a damnable mess!"

He sat perfectly still, staring at the letter which he had dropped again upon the tray, the cigarette smoking out in

a long ash between his fingers. He sat there until the fire reached his fingers, when he jerked it out of the window, and, rising, began to walk up and down the room. All the possible consequences of his fit of May-madness were filing before him, a ghostly throng, stretching out like the kings in Macbeth to the crack of doom. If his uncle knew he would surely disinherit him unless he married her. And the thought of being married thus violently, suddenly, against all his fixed theories, against the strongest instinct of his whole nature, filled Richard with a sort of panic-terror and revulsion. And, yet, he supposed that people would say he ought to marry her. "People!" when had he ever cared what "people" would say to his actions, good or bad? But his uncle, that was different. And his mother —would she stand by him if. . . . Yes, he thought she would stand by him through anything. And Phoebe herself. . . . He felt sorry for Phoebe in spite of his anger against her—the sort of anger that one feels against an object which has fallen and hurt one unwittingly—the emotion which makes a child strike the door against which it has hurt its head.

No, the thought of marrying her—of marrying anyone, was unbearable, suffocating, but especially the thought of marrying her. They had not really an idea in common, and, even if they had, marriage was a relationship that spoiled the subtlest emotions, just as a damp cellar spoils exquisite fabrics. And he had a sickening vision of Phoebe, modishly dressed, presiding over a well-appointed table in a richly furnished house full of clamorous children—of himself sitting down and rising up from this table or another like it, endlessly. His very spirit seemed to melt like wet paper within him at the picture. No—it must be arranged some other way. It could be arranged of course. Men settled such affairs secretly and discreetly every day. He was not a callous bounder to leave her without providing for her in her present situation. But how to do this? He would have to persuade her to come North. It would be the veriest folly for him to go down there to Virginia. . . . Would set tongues wagging. He must find some respectable woman. . . . Long Island. . . . Connecticut . . . a farm-house in Connecticut—he knew the very woman!

He took another turn and stopped mechanically before a tapestry of Susannah. The Elders' faces, round and

chubby above their white worsted beards, peeped at him from the yellow and blue foliage like the faces of naughty school-boys who had disguised themselves in false beards.

"What an idiotic tapestry," he thought irritably, waking for a moment to the offensive art of the design. And then all at once, between him and Susannah, rose the fresh form of Phoebe, with her loving smile. And that sharp hunger of the senses, so mortifying in its rude humanness to his would-be super-manly ego, and which had been dozing like a drugged cat, sprang up and clutched him. After all. . . . But the next moment revulsion came again. Feelings were not in question here; he must act and act promptly.

He invented a plausible excuse for his hostess and took the train to New York that noon.

The day after next a registered parcel was brought to Phoebe, where she lay fully dressed but white and dim-eyed on her bed, in the half-darkened room.

When she saw the hand-writing on its cover her heart seemed to shut and open. She stole from bed and locked the door. Then she cut the string, snipping it nervously with her little curved nail-scissors and slicing into the heavy oil-skin paper in which the parcel was wrapped. Inside she came upon another cover with many seals. On this lay a letter—the first thickly filled envelope that she had ever received from him. She started to tear it open with her little cold, shaking fingers, then thrust it in her breast and began to undo the second wrapper. She would keep the best for the last. She only prayed dumbly that he had not sent her more jewels. The wrapper was off at last. She lifted a fold of white tissue paper, then sat staring, seated on the edge of her bed, the box on her knee, her hands fallen away from it and lying loose at her sides. The faint yet penetrating scent of fresh twenty dollar bills rose to her nostrils. They were in two neat packages held together by little strips of white paper. Ever after, as long as she lived, the scent of fresh paper-money gave her the dreadful sensation that the scent of ether gives to those who have been suffocated for an operation.

She sprang to her feet the next instant, and the box fell to the floor. One of the little paper bands broke, and the crisp, green bills opened like a fan at her feet. She stumbled to the window. Somehow it was hard to get

her breath. She opened the shutters slightly, and struggled for it, her breast heaving painfully, the hair about her forehead wet as from a bath. When she had at last managed to draw one deep breath, she sat down by the parted shutters and, with eyes all wild and bright now, began to read the letter. When she had finished it she stayed quite still, as Richard had stayed by his window in Newport, and on her white lips was a little stiff smile. A dying marmoset has just such a little, stiffened smile over its small, human teeth.

It had taken Richard five hours to compose the letter that she had just read. Its method was elaborate but its gist simple. In it he began—not with her name—this communication, like all the others, neither had her name at the beginning nor his at the end—he began by an appeal to a certain bigness and freedom of spirit in her which he said that he had divined from the very first. He called on her not to bow her head before imbecile conventions, but to have the courage of her passion, and realise that real love can never be bound by laws, any more than the great primal force of a Samson could be bound by green withes. That to shear off the beautiful, wild tresses of love with the dull shears of law only deprived it of all its strength, and delivered it a mere soulless hulk into the hands of the Philistines. He said that now, at this vital point in her life, she should rise above herself, and meet love on the high, joyous, light-swept plateau of freedom. He bade her think of Isolde and Guinevere and Sappho and Aspasia, or, if she wanted an example more staid, let her recall the long life of honour led by Marian Evans in the companionship of Lewes. He reminded her that she already knew his theory of life when they became lovers. He appealed to her sense of justice and stated that she could not but admit that he had informed her repeatedly of his overwhelming aversion from marriage and his fixed determination, under no circumstances (these last two words were underscored), under no circumstances ever to marry.

He said that for him to come to her at this time would be madness—since what could he do but take her away with him? And that, in her present oversensitive condition, to have all the filth of gossip spattered over their linked names would mean torture to her.

He assured her that, if she would only be as sweetly

reasonable as he knew it was her nature to be, all could be satisfactorily arranged. That he was very fond of her and would make every provision for her safety and comfort. She must not let false pride stand in her way at this crucial point in her life—in both their lives. But, then, he was sure that in her lovely nature there was no such thing as false pride, and that she would accept and use the sum which he forwarded her for immediate necessities in as frank and affectionate a spirit as that in which he sent it. Then followed directions, painstakingly minute, as to how part of this sum was to be employed by her. She was to go to Crewe, as though leaving for a short visit to the University of Virginia. Then she would go on to Charlottesville. When she reached that town she was to take a train on the Southern Railway, as he had found that those trains went straight through to New York without any fatiguing stop in Washington. He would meet her at the New York terminus himself. Here followed a description of the "kind and perfectly respectable woman" in whose care he would place her. He had done this woman's husband a service once, which made her now a most valuable and dependable ally. Afterwards—she could go to France or Italy and he would join her there. Richard had reflected over this last assertion for a long time, and had finally decided that, even if plans were altered later, some such promise was necessary to induce Phoebe to follow his instructions quietly. At least, she should never lack for every comfort and refinement in her surroundings. He was even sorry now that he had to send her to this plain farm-house, but there was no choice.

He wound up by saying that she could count on his loyalty and affection, and must not allow herself to become overwrought through anxiety and thus possibly delay the journey which it was so vitally necessary for her to make at once.

Richard had never before written even a page of such sound, clear English as composed this letter of some twenty sheets. Phoebe sat quite still, hour after hour, and the little smile looked as though pasted on her lips, for it never grew more or less, or changed in any way.

At sunset she stirred, shivered all over once, then got slowly to her feet. She went to her little greenish Colonial mirror on its stand of inlaid mahogany and, tilting it forward, looked at her reflected face. As she noticed the

odd smile on her mouth she passed her hand over it, wiping it away. Then she opened one of the drawers in the mirror stand and took out a box of pink nail-salve. Carefully she put a little on either dead-white cheek, then rubbed it gently.

"Father mustn't see my face like this," she said aloud. And her voice startled her, so that she dropped the box of nail-salve. It rolled under the dressing-table and she let it lie there.

Then she went and, shivering again all over as she touched them, lifted the bills and packed them neatly away. Her eyes were wide and still very bright and wild, but her fingers, though cold, did not shake any longer. She found a piece of clean wrapping-paper and did the parcel up in it. Next, taking out the box which held the circlet of crysoprase, she wrapped that also with slow care, and then wrote Richard's club address (the only one that he had sent her) across the top of both. Under it she printed "By Registered Post." Then she took his letter and sat down again on the edge of the bed with it in her hand. Presently she rose, lighted a candle and, taking out the hearth-screen of old glazed blue wall-paper with its edge of strawberry-flowers, burnt the letter, sheet by sheet, in the empty fire-place.

When this was done she replaced the screen and, going noiselessly downstairs, passed on tiptoe the room where her father was at work, and went out of the house towards Hollybrook Wood.

In the heart of the wood she stopped, and sinking on a cushion of green moss with its little red fungi that she used to think the fairies' cups, she leaned back against a great oak, and let her arms trail at her sides. She looked up into hanging caverns of dark leaves and thought of nothing—unless the conviction "those are leaves . . . they are moving a little . . . the breeze moves them . . . that pink between them is the sky . . . it is the sunset," unless these convictions could be called thought.

At one o'clock that night, rising from the bed on which she had lain down without undressing and still with that strange, stiff numbness of mind and flesh upon her, Phoebe wrote a second letter to Richard. It was in short sentences, very bare and simple, and it had neither his name at the beginning nor hers at the end, after the fashion he had shown her.

She said that she returned the money because it was impossible for her to use his money. That she was sorry if this offended him but it was her feeling and would not change. That what he asked her was to break her father's heart in his old age. She could not do that no matter what happened to her. She said, "If you were to marry me I would leave you entirely free. I would not even ask to be with you." And she begged him to excuse her for writing such a short letter, but that her head felt strange. "If you marry me," she wrote again, "I will worship you, but I will never even ask to see you afterwards if you do not wish it."

Then she herself took the two parcels and the letter to Crewe the next afternoon, driving "Killdee" in the little "jumper" which they used to send for the post, for she felt too strange and numb still to think of riding.

This letter brought from Richard another even more vehement than the first. This time he enclosed a fifty-dollar bill, telling her that her attitude was sheer madness; that if she would only follow his directions their unwedded love could be made so fair a thing that her father's reconcilement to it would be only a question of time. He did not reflect while writing this last sentence that "a question of time" in reference to a rather infirm old man, nearly eighty, had its ironical aspect. He conjured her by her affection for him (Richard) and out of regard to herself to come at once to New York, where, as he had said before, he would be waiting for her at the station. Two days later he received an envelope with the Crewe postmark, in which he found the fifty-dollar bill and half a sheet of paper, on which was written in Phoebe's round, girlish hand, "I cannot do it, Richard."

Again Richard wrote, and again the fifty-dollar bill went on its travels between New York and Virginia. It was returned as before, but this time there was no writing with it.

Richard became frantic with apprehension. A dark anger against Phoebe burned at his heart. God only knew whether people were not already talking. This delay was criminal. He had no knowledge of how soon such things became apparent to the eyes of other women. He wrote again. When five days had gone by without any answer from the girl, he decided, after a sleepless night, to write and make a clean breast of the whole affair to his mother.

She knew him as no one else had ever known or would know him. When she realised how impulsive had been his fault, how horrible and deliberate might be its consequences to his whole life, she would intervene, bring Phoebe to reason (though, of course, she would not follow his plan for a reunion) and prevent, in some way, all possibility of so disastrous a marriage. And yet . . . he was not so sure, after all, of what would be his mother's ideas on the question. She had rigid, old-fashioned notions on the subject of "honour" and family. Phoebe was a kinswoman, though distant. It was possible . . . he shivered. . . . Yes, now he thought it quite possible that his mother might insist on his marrying the girl.

He thought and thought over this. The hatred of marriage, especially of this marriage, had grown into an obsession with him during the past two weeks. He felt that he would rather be dead than married to Phoebe—and he was ardently attached to life.

Suddenly he remembered something that had passed between him and another man in Newport. This man, Herbert Stokes by name, had hailed him one morning at the "Casino."

"Hullo, Bryce," he had said. "Hear you're off on a Chinese opera. I'm off to China itself in two weeks. Better come along and tuck in local colour for the opera."

Richard would have liked to go very well, but not at that time, and not with Herbert Stokes. However, being rather interested in the notion, he had questioned Stokes about his plans. Stokes intended to sail from Brindisi to India, despite the season, thence to Hong Kong.

"Come along, old chap," he had urged (he thought Richard and his theories great fun), "I'll give you a bunk in my cabin. I sail the 28th of June in the 'Wilhelm der Grosse,' a capital boat. Come along."

Richard's heart went very fast. Today was the 26th of June. He could post the letter to his mother on the 27th and sail the day that she received it. He would add a postscript to say that Stokes had offered to share his cabin with him, and that it was such an opportunity to study Chinese music in the land of its origin that he had felt he must not refuse. He would say that he thought she could manage everything better, really, if he were out of the country.

Richard felt that he was doing a dastardly thing, an act

of the most ruthless and cowardly selfishness both towards Phoebe and towards his mother,—that is, he felt the discomfort which such actions cause even to the doer, but he veiled the bare bones of fact from himself with swaddlings of sophistry.

Yes, once he was actually out of the country on a prolonged trip like that, Phoebe would be compelled to reason, and he could trust his mother's pride to keep such a secret inviolate, especially from his Uncle Owen.

He wrote the letter, posted it as he had planned, on the 27th, and on the 28th sailed with Stokes for Naples.

XVII

DURING those five days of her silence Phoebe had gone through almost every phase of torture that her situation could devise. Only one throe had as yet been spared her—hatred of the man whom she had loved so wildly. And, to save herself from the dreadful possibility, she began to lay to her own account all that had happened. Yes, it was cruel, terribly cruel of him to remind her that she had known well his views of life before giving herself to him wholly—but it was just. She had known and rebelled against them. And she recalled the day they had almost quarrelled about the Brownings, and the feeling of dejected sadness that had crept over her at his jeering words, "They took a great passion by the nape and made it respectable."

Yes, she had tied the bandage warm with love's eyes tight, tight about her own. But then, he also had known her views, simple as they were. Surely he could not have thought. . . . Yet as surely he had thought her light, else. . . . And hot shame, like a breath from the furnace of degradation, would sweep her from head to feet. Oh, if it were true, that he did not love her . . . were not her father so old and so fond—she would rather die than be married to him. But then, in this wrong, strange way, he did love her. He would not urge her to come to him if he had no love for her. . . . Then she thought of the little box of fresh, green bills, of the fifty-dollar note that had gone back and forth between them so often, and again shame withered her.

Yet it was not possible that this was all . . . this dread-

ful silence, in which she seemed struggling like one buried alive. If she were only dumb and patient a little longer he would come to himself . . . he would see and realise that she could not strike down her own father in his old age with the cruellest of weapons, dishonour and ingratitude, —he would come to his best self, the noble self that was really *he*—and all would be well again, and this present horror like a black dream that has passed with daybreak.

When, however, the sixth day came and went also in silence, a wild, fierce rage awoke in Phoebe. "If I were alone in the world," she thought, "he should not marry me now, though he came crawling. If I had not my father and the . . . child to think of . . . I would kill him before I would marry him."

And she sat down suddenly, trembling all over, for that was murder which she had felt in her heart. But before the trembling had ceased a new passion almost as terrible was upon her. The desire for revenge—the desire to make him suffer something of what she was enduring. And she thought and thought how she might hurt him—savagely, in a vital part, striking with all her force. And again she trembled violently. This was more terrible than anything that had yet been. Did she then hate Richard? Was she, in addition to her unspeakable shame, going to bear the child of hatred? No, no! She did not hate him—she only wanted him to share in her suffering. That sad paradox of passion which makes the injured wish to torture what they still adore confused and wrung her. But her anger did not abate; it grew and grew, until by the next day it had become an obsession with her.

As she lay upon her sleepless bed that night, her eyes, that felt as though scorched by the dry lids—fixed upon the freckled darkness that swam so dizzyingly before her —a wild solution leaped into her mind. His mother! She could wound him through his mother! More than anything, she felt, it would hurt him to have his mother know of this cowardly thing that he had done to a young girl, so lonely, so undefended, one of his own kin. And she thought, "Tomorrow I will go and tell his mother. He will hate me, and she will hate me, but he will have to marry me then. And my father and the child will be saved from dishonour." She did not think of saving her own honour. She felt that even marriage could not save that which was so irrevocably lost in her own eyes since

he had only used her like a toy which is cast aside when broken.

The next morning she dressed herself very carefully in a plain white linen frock and put on a simple hat that drooped low over her eyes.

"I am going to see Mrs. Bryce, father," she said. "I have told Lily to be sure to give you your biscuit and Madeira at eleven."

"Thank you, my dear. I am glad to see that you feel well enough to go for a visit, but you are still very pale. If you would only consent to my asking Patton. . . . "

"No, no, father, dear. Please . . . I am really very well. I am always a little pale in summer."

And, kissing him gently on the cheek, she got into the "jumper" and turned "Killdee's" head towards World's-End.

The old man looked after her, troubled.

"The child's lips felt cold," he said to himself. "I must really persuade her to let me send for Patton."

Then he became absorbed in untangling a knot in the ancestral intricacies of the Queen Anne County Nelsons, and forgot how chilly those young lips had felt against his cheek.

The day was fair and glowing. Great silver-breasted clouds swam on the blue lake of air. In Hollybrook wood the quivering sun-spots played over her white gown and "Killdee's" satin coat, in dapples of gold, light as gossamer. There was a sweet, warm scent of summer through everything, mingled of the fragrance of fruit and flowers and new-cut grass, and the strong, fertile soil that bred them.

She let "Killdee" drink at the ford, and thought with a sick pang of the day she had looked up and seen Richard on his black mare at the top of the hill. The dandelions, that had seemed so like little scattered gold coins, were long gone. The grass was dark and unbroken by wild flowers, and some Southdown sheep, looking too heavy for their slim, black legs,—with black Roman noses glued to the earth, were cropping it, moving slowly as they grazed. In their sun-lit whiteness seen from a distance they resembled other clouds, slowly travelling over a dark green sky.

When Phoebe reached the bridge at the foot of the slanting lawn she stopped "Killdee" and sat gazing up at the

white columns of the house that was his home. Yes, here he had been born—he had played through those rooms and over this very lawn, when he was an innocent little child, before her father and mother were married—before she had been even thought of. Where had she been then? Or had she been anywhere? And now he was a man, and she . . . she was coming to tell his mother what sort of man that little, romping boy—whom she seemed to see so plainly—had grown into. But this thought only lighted a darker fire in her heart. Others should suffer. . . . She would not suffer all alone. She was a consistent pagan, even in her misery, for she had never thought of God as being wroth with her. And Christ had been coldly kind to the woman taken in sin. His very perfectness had made him seem far and indifferent—but neither, she felt, would His sentiment towards her be one of anger—a gentle, uncomprehending pity perhaps, and abstract pity could not help her.

As the old butler showed Phoebe into the cool, dim rose-parlour, suddenly, without warning, a dissolving fear came upon her. What was she doing here? How had she come? Was she mad? Would they take her and put her in some awful place? With a heart beating to suffocation she rushed towards the door, which old Jonathan had closed behind her. As she reached it it opened again and Sally entered quickly, closing it once more.

Phoebe stared at her, shaking in all her limbs—a dark, thick cloud settling down about her. She could see nothing distinctly—only a pale blur that she knew was Sally's face, and the black oblong of her tall figure. She felt an arm catch and support her—she was being led towards a sofa.

"Sit here . . . I will bring you some wine," she heard a deadly quiet voice saying, as though far away. The arm was withdrawn, she felt a pillow slipped beneath her head —then she fainted.

When she came to herself Richard's mother was holding a little bottle to her nostrils that made her strangle and cough—she tried to rise upon her elbow.

"Lie still," said the deadly quiet voice.

Phoebe obeyed. After a moment the voice said:

"You must drink this," and a strong wine was put to her lips. She obeyed again, swallowing a few mouthfuls with difficulty.

"Now lie quite still again."

Phoebe lay very still, closing her eyelids. Opening them heavily a moment later she saw Sally's black eyes fixed upon her with a strange expression. It was not hatred, nor pity, nor comprehension, but a something mixed of all these, and it was full of great pain.

"You . . . know?" whispered Phoebe.

"Yes, I know."

There was silence. Phoebe wished that she could have died before his mother had looked at her like that. Suddenly she struggled again to rise.

"I must go!" she cried wildly. Sally put a hand on her arm. "You must let me go! You must let me go!" There was such desperate pain and such desolation in this cry that all of woman in Sally went out to meet it.

She took Phoebe's hand and held it firmly but gently in both her own.

"Don't be afraid of me . . . I want to help you."

Phoebe's wild, bright eyes fled from her to the door. "Oh, let me go. . . . Please let me go," she panted.

"You are ill. You can't go now. Try to be quiet. I want to be your . . . your friend."

"It's no use! It's no use! . . . If he doesn't love. . . ."

"He loves no one but himself," said Sally in a hard voice. "Try to be reasonable. You must help me to help you."

All at once Phoebe became very gentle. She looked up in Sally's face with dark, mournful eyes. "I didn't know you were kind," she said. "I used to be afraid of you. You are kind, but under it you hate me. . . . I feel it."

Sally returned her look this time inscrutably. "You must try to be reasonable," she said again. "I will do all in my power for you. I have something that I must tell you. You will need all your courage."

Phoebe's eyes grew wide and wild again. Her white lips framed the word "Why?" but no sound came from them.

"Will you try to be quiet if I tell you?—I must tell you, because suspense is worse than anything for you now."

"Tell me," motioned the white lips from which no sound came.

"I received a letter this morning from . . . my son,"

said Sally—she could not bring herself to utter Richard's name just then. "He sailed for the East yesterday."

Phoebe still gazed at her. Her lips were parted but did not stir now.

Sally came and sat beside her on the sofa, as much to escape from that haunting look, as out of pity—though she was certainly moved by a profound pity. She put her thin, soft palm over Phoebe's interlaced fingers.

"Poor girl—do you understand?" she said.

Phoebe spoke, articulating thickly.

"To . . . the East?" she said, in a whisper.

"Yes . . . to the far East . . . to India . . . to China. He will be gone," she just paused and then said slowly, gravely, "for over a year."

Phoebe sat deathly quiet. She seemed scarcely to breathe. Presently she said in an almost inaudible voice, "Thank you . . . for telling me."

Something in that deathly stillness alarmed Sally. She put her hand on Phoebe's shoulder this time. "You can trust me," she said. "Try to get what comfort you can from that."

"Thank you," said Phoebe again. She rose, she was not trembling now. Her eyes were steady. Sally rose too. "When I have thought out everything I will come to Nelson's Gift and talk it over with you," she said. Suddenly her voice broke.

"I am very, very sorry for you," she added. "And . . . " she swallowed, turning away her face. "Part of the pain is mine . . . my only son is a coward."

"Good-bye," said Phoebe. She went slowly towards the door.

The instinctive feeling of one woman for another moved Sally from the thought of her own pain. She caught up the glass of wine and followed Phoebe.

"Drink the rest of this before you go," she urged, but Phoebe, smiling mutely, put aside her hand and went from the dim room out into the glowing day again.

Sally stood watching, behind the curtains of the Rose-room window, while old Jonathan handed the girl into the "jumper" as though it had been a court coach, and David put the reins into her hand. She had not gone with Phoebe to the front portico, feeling that the girl would rather leave that house alone. And, though she never cared for Phoebe, something in the listless lines of the beautiful

young figure, so nymph-like, so girlish, went suddenly to her heart. It was her son, *her* son, who had done this dreadful thing. The child that would be born of that young girl driving off there, so lonely, in the shabby little vehicle which meant dire poverty—that child would be her grandchild! Sally's heart contracted with pain. She put up her hand to it, and standing there behind the shielding curtain broke suddenly into bitter tears.

As Phoebe came to the stone bridge over the Green-Flower, she had to draw aside for a carriage that approached from the opposite direction. It was Owen, who thought to give Sally a pleasant surprise by arriving a day or two before the first of July. As he passed Phoebe he started up and was about to call to his driver to stop, but it seemed to him that she did not see him, though she looked straight at him. Her face so white and pinched gave him a shock. Some intuition made him sink back again, without doing more than lifting his hat with a smile and a "How d'ye do, Phoebe?" Then he saw in truth that though she had been looking so directly at him she had not seen him, for she drove by in silence, her wide, dark eyes now fixed on the distance.

Sally had barely time to escape to her own room as she heard the sound of wheels on the gravel. When Hannah came and told her gleefully that Owen had arrived she grew quite faint. This was dreadful. She had so counted on those two days still left her before his coming, to settle all arrangements about Phoebe. If Owen should ever know—should ever guess even . . . As deeply, burningly indignant as she was with Richard,—as fierce and honest as was her scorn for his brutal cowardice,—still he was her only son, ardently beloved. Owen must never, never know. She would go that very afternoon to Nelson's Gift. Yes, she would surely go, for not only did Owen's unexpected arrival fill her with dread, but there had been that in Phoebe's way of receiving those crushing tidings which even now made her sick with a vague, foreboding apprehension. She bathed her face carefully, and went down to greet him with an affectionate smile on her lips.

"Dear Owen! How very, very nice! And I've heard from Mary. She'll be here Wednesday."

She quivered inwardly—a sort of tremor of the vitals—when she thought that she must tell Owen of Richard's

sudden departure for the East. Yes, she must certainly tell him, and as soon as he asked about Richard, for any delay might look suspicious later on.

"You look better than I expected from your letters, dear," said he, kissing her. "But tell me, what is the matter with Phoebe Nelson? I was shocked when I saw the child just now. She looks very ill to me. Has she been ill?"

Sally's expression was very natural—not overdone or too indifferent.

"She's rather an obstinate little thing," she said. "I was just telling her that she ought to be in bed instead of rushing about the country in that rough, shaky trap. She has a sort of slow fever that seems to have hung on from the spring. I'm going over to speak to her father about her this afternoon."

"Good!" said Owen heartily, "that's awfully nice of you, Sally. I'll just come along too. She's a dear child. I hate to see her look like that. I knew you'd grow fond of her."

And he gave his sister's thin shoulder a little squeeze as she stood near him.

When Owen said that he would go with her to Nelson's Gift that afternoon, Sally felt again that queer tremor of the vitals. She longed to talk with Phoebe's father, to pave the way for suggesting to him that what the girl needed was a complete change of air, and that she, Sally, would be delighted to have Phoebe go with her to the sea-side. But this could not well be done if Owen were present.

"Poor Sallykins," said Owen, looking at her nervous, sallow face out of which she tried hard to keep the perturbation of her thoughts. "now that I've had time to see you, I don't find you looking at all well yourself. It's a good thing Mary and I have come to buck you up a bit. Richard should have looked after you better. By the way . . . where is Richard? Hullo, Wizzy!"

Wizzy was one of Sally's strongest aversions, but she had never welcomed anything more gladly than she did now the advent of that desperately excited little dog, who came sliding and slipping amid a rattle of toenails down the long hall. Hannah took care of him during Owen's absence, and he never entered "the big house" while his master was away, but now that beloved scent had somehow

been imparted to him from Hannah's skirts, and he rushed to welcome his god. He whined and leaped upon those adored legs, sneezing with overwrought emotion every time that he attempted a bark of welcome, and Owen, sitting down in one of the hall chairs, lifted him to his knees.

Sally sank into another chair beside them, and the relief of Wizzy's presence brought her so far as to lay one of her hands on his little sleek, snaky head. He promptly growled and Owen laughed, pinching his nose a little, which made him sneeze again.

"Dogs always know," he said, "blandishments from their enemies never deceive them."

"But I'm not 'an enemy'—I don't dislike them. I only don't care to have them too near me."

"Even Wizzy is laughing at that lame explanation," said Owen, and indeed Wizzy did seem to be grinning sardonically at Sally, with his tongue hanging out to the roots, and his black lips edged as with "pinking" near the jaws, drawn back almost to his collar.

"It isn't really the dogs—it's the red mud they bring in," continued Sally, pursuing desperately this subject while thinking, "I must speak naturally when I do have to answer. I mustn't speak too carelessly.

"Wizzy, I think you might make friends with me," she coaxed again, extending her hand—but again Wizzy gave his warning growl as of a little kettle about to boil over.

"But where's Richard?—how is he?" asked Owen again.

"Owen," said Sally gravely, "I'm very, very much annoyed with Richard."

The perfect naturalness of her own voice in saying this astonished herself.

"Why, what now?" said he, trying to keep out of his tone the mingled amusement and irritation that a new vagary of Richard always caused him.

"He has gone away, Owen. . . . He has gone off for a long trip to the East . . . most unexpectedly. . . . He went with Herbert Stokes—who offered to share his cabin with him."

"Herbert Stokes!" echoed Owen, eyebrows lifted. "The 'all round sport' chap! What in Heaven's name possessed Master Richard to go off with Herbert Stokes of all men?"

"You know Richard, Owen. He's perfectly unaccountable."

"What part of the East?"

"India and China."

"What a time of the year to choose! He'll suffocate. When did he go?"

"He sails today. He only wrote me of it yesterday."

"And he left you all alone here like that—without warning?"

"It was very wrong of him. It has hurt me very much."

Owen took Wizzy's polished little head in both his hands, and looked down into the adoring, white-rimmed eyes.

"Wizzy," said he, "I believe that you could have brought up Master Richard more wisely than your Aunt Sally and I have done."

XVIII

OWEN, who disliked driving as a diversion, rode "The Clown" that afternoon, and Sally sat in the carriage alone with her thoughts for all those hot five miles. The day had grown very sultry and, when Owen rode back to her now and then, "The Clown" looked like a blue horse, with the reflection of the sky on his soaked grey hide. Distant storms were playing all about them. The muffled thunder sounded like some drowsy jungle-beast over a half devoured kill.

"Do you think we shall be caught in a storm at Nelson's Gift?" she asked him nervously, once when he rode up.

"No . . . the 'cloud dun tun', as the darkies say. They're catching it down the river though. I wish it would come our way, even at the cost of a ducking. The corn needs it badly."

He rode off again.

Sally's thoughts went on and on, bruising her tired head. "Will she see us? How will she act if she does? . . . If she's too ill will she let me come up to her bedroom? I shall have to go over again tomorrow without Owen. But I must see her this afternoon. She's in a dreadful state. . . . Anything might happen. . . . She might do some reckless thing . . . something awful." Sally shuddered with a sort of hot-coldness in the sultry air. . . . And suddenly it came over her with desolating reality that in this, the most frightful crisis of her whole life, of three lives, she was debarred from consulting Owen, the one of

all others on whom she most leaned, whose advice she valued most.

"Ah," she reflected bitterly, "barren women are saved more than they dream of."

Mr. Nelson was in the green-panelled room as usual, his manuscripts about him.

He was evidently much gratified at their visit, and especially pleased to see Owen. His long old face lighted up, and his smile was warm even over the chill perfection of his teeth. Phoebe, he said, would be so distressed to have missed them. She had a bad headache and had gone out for a walk, thinking to relieve it by air and exercise. He regretted that he had not thought to ask her in which direction she intended going.

Sally was relieved and anxious at the same time. She was relieved that Owen would not see Phoebe, but her anxiety was poignant when she thought of the girl walking alone in that sultry air, with a possible storm gathering about her. She tried to divert her thoughts by glancing about the room, while Owen and Mr. Nelson talked of the latter's book, and his farming. She looked up at the portrait of Phoebe's mother with its weak, candid brow, and sweet mouth shaped as by the singing of hymns. Suddenly tears stung her eyes as she thought of Phoebe with her mother gone, and only that old, pedantic scholar, his life spent in rummaging the annals of the dead, to stand between her and evil.

Bitterly the vision of Richard, moving a trusted guest and kinsman through that simple home, wrecking it, devastating a young girl's whole life and being—bitterly and cruelly this vision of her only son rose before her.

"He is a wicked man," she told herself, aching with pain and anger. "My son is an evil-hearted, wicked man—a common seducer. I have heard of such things all my life. Now it has happened to me. . . . And I am all alone with this dreadful burden . . . he has left me and that poor girl to bear it all alone."

More than the bitterness of death was upon Sally as she sat there quietly in her cool, embroidered grey gown, gazing at the mild, loving face of Phoebe's mother.

But as the moments passed and still Phoebe did not return, or Sally bring up the chief object of their visit, Owen spoke out suddenly. "To tell you the truth, sir," he said, "we came on purpose to talk to you about Phoebe

—I was awfully distressed today to see her looking so pale and run down."

"Yes," replied Mr. Nelson, "I have been troubled for some weeks about my little girl . . . she is an old man's ewe lamb, you know," he added and his old voice shook a little. "But," he continued, before either of his guests could speak. "She assures me that she is really better of late. I cannot persuade her to see Dr. Patton."

"We must think of some nice plan for her," said Sally, "a complete change of air would probably do her more good than any doctor."

"Doubtless—doubtless," said Mr. Nelson sadly. He was thinking that most of the nine thousand paid last January by Owen for Hollybrook Wood had gone to lift the mortgage, and that the rest was invested in a bond, entirely safe, but that brought him in only sixty extra dollars a year. And even this sixty, so urgently needed for daily necessities, would not furnish sufficient means for a change of air such as Phoebe needed.

"I should be delighted," said Sally, determining suddenly to speak, and hurrying the words a little in spite of herself, "if . . . if I should decide to go to the seaside later —some time next month, perhaps, to take Phoebe with me." And now she saw that Owen was looking at her with the most candid surprise, for she had never in her life left World's-End in summer for the seashore. The next moment, however, he thought. "That will really be an excellent idea for them both. Sally is a great dear to think of taking the child with her."

"You are more than kind," said the old man, much moved. "I have no adequate terms at my command with which to thank you. . . . "

A long growl of thunder, much nearer than any that had been before, interrupted him, and Owen started up.

"I think I'll have a hunt for Phoebe," he said, as he went out.

The sick fear of something vague and yet terrible that might happen at any moment seized Sally again, but controlling it as best she could she turned to Phoebe's father and began to talk to him about the coast of Maine and New Hampshire, and of how invigorating it was, especially to Southerners, worn by the heavy heat of such a June as was just past.

In the meantime, Owen, with his eyes on the great,

threatening bulge of purplish-black that hung over Idler's Mountain, strode faster and faster towards Hollybrook Wood. He felt tolerably sure that, on such a dense, hot afternoon as this, a girl with a headache would make for its cool depths.

He was a lover of storms and even his anxiety for Phoebe could not prevent his taking pleasure in the lurid quickening of all the scene about him. The foliage of the trees, lashed and beaten by high currents of wind, changed to a livid hue. A strange, wild light struck the distant pastures, and the grazing sheep were turned by it as to flecks of mica. A flock of pigeons streamed glinting against the ominous sky—and every now and then a flash of lightning, like a gilded crack in a huge shell, would split the heavens. "All the same," he thought as he quickened his gait to a run, "that storm won't reach us—it's going down the Green-Flower like the others. But Phoebe may get a fright . . . " and he ran on till he reached the wood. As he entered its great, dusky aisles and felt its damp fragrance all about him, he was newly thankful that he had been able to save it from the saw-mill. The giant pines were landmarks for miles around. Little mossy paths veined it as with jade and malachite, and, where Hollybrook itself ran trilling its low song, ferns curved lush and tough-stemmed.

It was very still here in the woods, the only sound a harsh rushing far overhead, where the wind lashed the topmost branches—"a sound as of going" in the trees.

Owen walked on, calling now and then, "Phoebe! Phoebe!" and once or twice giving the far-carrying Australian cry, "coo-ee!" but no one answered him.

He had come to a little lawn, covered with wild-violet leaves like the grave of Keats, where the brook lilted half-asleep through a covert of hazel and kalmia and elder-shrubs—he had just reached this spot and was about to step across it when a new sound caught his ear, driving the blood from his face—the sound of a long, low, piteous moaning. Some little woodland thing, caught in a springe, might moan like that. It rose and fell, regular and rhythmic as though the heart itself might have been marking its beats with faint sounds of anguish.

Owen sprang forward, a sudden ice in all his veins.

The one leap brought him to where Phoebe lay, face down, her hands clutching the warm moss.

"Oh, Phoebe, Phoebe! little Phoebe . . . my poor little

child . . . my poor little Phoebe," cried Owen, and he threw himself on the ground beside her, and tried to lift her in his arms. But she clung frantically to the earth, like a desperate child to its mother's breast. "No . . . no . . . no . . . no," she moaned, "oh, no . . . no . . . no . . . no."

"Phoebe, dear—dear child, I must hurt you, I fear," said Owen, his face convulsed with pity and alarm, "but I must lift you up, dear. I must take you to the house."

At this she stopped struggling, and Owen lifted her in his arms, and felt with another pang how light she was. The little wrist that swayed out over his shoulder looked delicately brittle in its thinness. In her pale fingers were bits of the moss and leaves that she had clutched.

To carry a swooning girl for nearly half a mile, no matter how slight and thin she may be, is a feat that takes strength and endurance of no mean order. He reached Nelson's Gift with the sweat running down his face.

Terrified as he was, he had yet the wisdom to go around with Phoebe to the kitchen instead of bearing her like that into her father's presence.

Aunt Patty was not the hysterical type of negress, but a quiet, staid old woman; her worn face had looked on much sorrow, and she was well acquainted with the dark surprises of life.

She laid her hand on Lily's shoulder as the girl opened her lips as if to scream and said sternly:

"Don't you dar' holler—dis ain't no time for hollerin'—dis is actin' time. You go on up and set Miss Phoebe's bed ready, an' I'll show Mr. Randolph whar to carry her. Come dis way, suh. We-all kin go up de back steps."

They laid Phoebe on her little bed of white wood painted with blue roses and Aunt Patty stood and smoothed the damp hair from the unconscious forehead, her harsh, toil-roughened palm catching on the silken locks.

"My l'il honey . . . my po' l'il lamb," she murmured.

"Mrs. Bryce is here, Aunt Patty," Owen told her. "I'll go bring her up."

As he left the room, Phoebe's red-bird flew from the cage of which the door stood open, and lighted on the foot of the bed.

Aunt Patty looked at it and her brow contracted. "I don't like dee sign of birds in sickness," he heard her mutter. "No, I don't."

Jimmy Toots was strutting on the window-sill. Now, as if jealous of the red-bird, he gave a displeased "caw" and fluttered over beside him.

"Too many birds . . . too many birds." crooned Aunt Patty, and she said "shoo" and shook her apron at him. King Reddy flew to the mirror, but Jimmy Toots, ruffling all his feathers forward, merely scratched his ear leisurely, then, stretching one leg far out behind him, drew it up under his sooty down, and, resting upon the other, remained imperturbably where he was.

Owen went to the door of the drawing-room and asked Mr. Nelson if he would excuse Sally for a moment—that Phoebe wished to see her. The old gentleman expressed himself as most grateful to Owen for finding Phoebe and bringing her safely home.

"She will fetch some Madeira and thin biscuit for us now," he ended in a pleasant voice. "My daughter is a thrifty little housekeeper, and not even Patty is allowed to use her keys."

Sally came out and gazed up at him with a white face.

"Phoebe is very ill," he said. "I found her in the wood in a dreadful state. She is unconscious. You had better go up at once. When I've broken it to the old man, I'll take 'The Clown' and go for Patton."

"Wait!" cried Sally and her thin fingers dug into his arm.

"Wait? Why?" he asked startled.

Sally tried to speak, and a harsh croak came from her lips. She gave a sort of hysterical laugh "It's . . . it's . . . the shock. . . . Is she delirious?" she asked, stammering.

"No . . . unconscious. But a doctor. . . . "

"Let me see her first. She has a horror of doctors. . . . Don't you remember. Her father said so. . . . Any shock now . . . any shock, I mean. . . . It would be terribly dangerous to give her any shock. I'll see her first."

And Sally rushed off up the winding stairway of the front hall.

"Jimmy Toots" was still keeping sombre vigil on the bed-foot as she entered, and Aunt Patty rocking and crooning with the girl's little dead-looking hand held against her breast.

"Open the shutters—wide!" said Sally in a harsh voice. "Now come help me."

Together they slipped away the pillow from under

Phoebe's head, opened her bodice and, cutting the lace of the corset, dragged it from under her. The girl's face, lying there with sightless eyes and little chin, pointed towards the whitewashed ceiling, struck to her heart. On the pale lips was that stiffened smile of a dying marmoset.

Sally took a towel and, wetting it, struck it sharply on Phoebe's cheeks and temples. After a minute or two the girl gave a long, faint moan and half opened her eyes. Quick as thought Sally bent close to her, her fingers on the pulse which was beating thinly but regularly.

"*You're safe*," she said, "I'm with you. I'm going to keep you safe."

The girl wearily closed her eyes and turned away her face.

Sally had great nervous strength, and she propped the limp body up in her arms and held it against her, while Aunt Patty brought the plain little nainsook nightgown. Together again the knotted black hands and the thin sallow ones clothed the girl in the fresh garment, and drawing back the sheet laid her in her bed.

"I must plait this or it will have to be cut off," said Sally. "Hold her head steady on the pillow while I comb it out."

She was assured now that Phoebe was in no danger of her life. She had merely been in a long swoon of utter exhaustion brought on by her condition and the horrible shock of that morning.

She combed and braided the bright hair.

As she was finishing "Jimmy Toots" flew suddenly at her and, giving her hand a sharp dig with his beak, beat his wings against her arm. She almost shrieked with the uncanny fright of it. There was a little blood-drop on her hand where his beak had struck.

"Oh, drive him out! . . . drive him away!" she cried to Aunt Patty.

Aunt Patty, advancing cautiously from behind, threw her apron over the crow and transferred him to his cage of osier which stood near the window.

"Dat's Satan's own bird," said she, "but he sho' love my baby. He thought you was harmin' her."

"Stay by her," whispered Sally, and ran downstairs to Owen.

"There's no need of a doctor," she said, as he came out

into the hall, hearing her step. "It's only a faint . . . the poor child's dreadfully run down. I'm going to stay all night . . . when I asked if she wouldn't see the doctor she nearly went off into another swoon. Take The Clown, and tell Mirabel to send me a bag with night things in it."

Here Mr. Nelson joined them, his thin face drawn with apprehension.

Sally rapidly repeated what she had said to Owen. The old man looked overwhelmed when she stated that she was going to remain at Nelson's Gift for the night.

"My dear Madam," he said, taking her hand in both his own, "how can I thank you?—if you had seen my little Phoebe more than once or twice it would be love for her that moved you, but as it is only the rarest, most generous kindliness of heart can prompt such an unselfish action."

She thought that Owen was looking at her rather strangely.

He suggested once more having Charles Patton in case of any unforeseen developments, and this time it was all that Sally could do to control the natural irritability of her temper. But finally it was decided that for the present Patton should not be sent for.

"Phoebe seems indeed to have an almost morbid dislike of the idea," said her father. "I agree with Mrs. Bryce that as there is no danger at present we had better not run the risk of agitating her unduly by his presence."

"Yes, yes—that is best . . . I'm sure of it," urged Sally.

And suddenly, with all his faculty of intuition, Owen felt convinced that there was something hidden and sinister in this strange eagerness of Sally to prevent a doctor from coming to Nelson's Gift that night.

He turned silently, and went out to mount "The Clown," a dark confusion of doubt, foreboding, grief, formless suspicion whirling through his mind.

XIX

THROUGH the eerie half-light of the retreating storm under wild witchlocks of ravelled cloud Owen rode fast towards World's-End. Always Phoebe's heart-rent

moaning and her one wild cry rang in his ears. The mere memory of that desolate cry shook his heart again. And he recalled the fragile lightness of her body when he had lifted her, and the touching helplessness of her little head against his arm, and that thin, pale wrist swaying loose so pitifully. Phoebe!—little Phoebe—so laughter-loving, so childlike in many ways—whence had she drawn the source of such a grief?—what tragedy had breathed on her, blighting her bright carelessness—and Sally—how strangely Sally had acted!—how her thin fingers had gripped his arm—it was because she did not wish him to go for a doctor that she had gripped his arm like that—Why? Why? There was something here hidden, dark, unnatural—it was as if Sally were in a plot with someone—were plotting to hide—some fearful thing—and from him. He could not order his thoughts. They broke on him from all sides, like evil creatures thrusting heads and stings from crevices in an impassable wall. The only thing that he felt clearly was the presence of something horrible and dark under the thick surface into which he could not see. Again and again Phoebe's face came before him as it had looked, stark and unconscious against his arm:—the sightless eyes, the little teeth just showing piteously between the parted lips. Again and again he heard the moaning, so desolate, so long drawn out, low and spent, as of some small woodland thing caught in a springe. But what—what could have brought her to this desperate pass? And not to have a doctor. Somehow he could not bring himself to believe that Sally really thought a doctor should not be sent for. But then, in that case, she had some reason. What could be her reason? Since Phoebe was ill enough to make her think it necessary to spend the night at Nelson's Gift—why not a doctor? And why should Sally care so much about her when she had only seen her once or twice? Yes, "once or twice" was what the old man had said. Sally was not impulsive or given to sudden affections. Now she would stay all night with a girl that she scarcely knew. Besides, she had said that Phoebe was not really ill. Yet she was going to spend the night watching by her.

And more and more that feeling as of something sinister and fateful, waiting to spring, grew and darkened the horizon of his mind; closed upon him in a smothering cloud of obscure dread, of peril half-surmised, of doubt, of pain,

of a sort of under-impulse of anger which made him wish to take Sally's arms and turn her so that she must face him, and compel her to give him the true reason for her strange conduct.

He rode back to Nelson's Gift with his mood in no way lightened, and went up himself to give Sally what he had brought her.

She wished to take the bag through the half-open door, but Owen said:

"No, please—I want to see you."

Then she came out hurriedly, closing the door behind her. She was still very pale, and her eyes looked deeper sunken in their dusky hollows.

"What is it, Owen? Please, don't keep me."

He looked straight into those restless eyes.

"Why are you so bent on not having Patton, Sally?"

She seemed to him to hold her breath for an instant. Then she said quietly.

"You heard what the girl's own father said."

"Yes—but why do *you* wish it?"

"I think that is self-evident."

"I do not think so," said Owen.

"Please give me my things, Owen. Phoebe is quieter when I am beside her."

"Why should she be quieter when you are beside her?—You are almost a stranger to her."

"I can't discuss that at a time like this, Owen. If you will not give me the bag I must go back without it."

Owen took her gently by the arm.

"There is something here I don't understand," he said. "You must explain it to me, Sally."

"You are acting very strangely at a time like this. Please let me go. You are hurting my arm."

"No, Sally, I am holding you very lightly. But you must clear things for me. Why are you staying here to-night? Why are you willing to take such a grave responsibility? To lead that old man into thinking that a doctor isn't needed? If anything dreadful should happen——"

Try as she might, Sally could not restrain the shudder that ran through her at these words. "I must know what is back of all this," said Owen, and his face that she only knew as kindly, and pleasantly ironical, was hard as flint

"If you will let me go now, Owen, I will come down later and talk with you."

"You promise?"

"Yes."

Then he released her arm, but when she had disappeared into Phoebe's room he stood for some moments longer gazing at the closed door, with brows drawn down, and lips set.

When he went back to the library he found Mr. Nelson leaning on a malacca stick by the window. He turned as Owen entered and his face brightened.

"Patty has just brought me word that Phoebe is much better," he said, "and now I am doubly glad to see that you are safely returned. The sky looks very ominous. I have been fearing that we might have a cloud-burst such as kept Mr. Bryce here for the night about the first of May."

Owen, who was walking towards him, stopped short, then moved forward again.

"I don't think we shall have a storm tonight, sir," he said. "Besides, if you don't object, I shall spend the night here in any case. That sofa will make a capital bed."

"I could not think of such a thing as letting you sleep on a leather couch, Mr. Randolph. The room that Mr. Bryce occupied is always kept in readiness for guests."

What the old gentleman was really anxious about was supper. Would Patty be able to serve a presentable supper? Were there eggs enough? How would she manage without Phoebe to direct her?

Owen had been gazing at the door of the closet where Richard's picture of Phoebe was kept. Now as the old gentleman's measured utterance ceased, he started.

"I will do just as you wish, sir, of course," he said.

"Even such small rest as my anxiety about my daughter may leave me," rejoined Mr. Nelson, "would be entirely dispelled were I to think of you as sleeping on a bare couch. But I see that you look towards your nephew's portrait. Would you care to see it again?"

"No——" said Owen abruptly. "No . . . thank you. I agree with you in thinking that it doesn't do Phoebe justice. And what patience she must have had posing for such an elaborate portrait. It must have taken quite a long time. . . . "

"Undoubtedly your nephew spent great pains upon it. That the likeness is not more striking is certainly not due to any lack of care on his part. For hours every day he would paint with the most undiminished ardour. On the

few occasions that I watched him at his work I was struck by his great perseverance. I am quite unacquainted with the methods of artists, but it struck me as both singular and praiseworthy that so young a man should so untiringly cover the same surface with different coats of paint. If to take pains is genius, sir, your nephew is certainly a genius."

Owen was standing at the window staring up at the sky, which was now almost blended with the dark earth. Only some fast gliding greyish blurs told where clouds were scudding over the black abyss of air. "I hope Richard didn't try your hospitality too far, Mr. Nelson," he said. "He's apt to forget other things where art is concerned."

"On the contrary," said Phoebe's father, "it was a great pleasure to have such an attractive youth at Nelson's Gift. He and Phoebe seemed to be very congenial companions. I believe it was a disappointment to her that he could not finish it this summer. But she told me that important business called him unexpectedly to New York, —the day after the storm if I remember rightly,—or no,— it was the day after that."

"The first of May I think you said?"

"About then,—or say;—I recall that it was after Phoebe's birthday,—about the second week in May, I think. We missed the young man. He plays chess quite well for a beginner. I won a game from him with considerable difficulty on the evening that he stayed all night with us."

Owen's temples ached with the pressure from his quickened heart. He was like one who has been stunned for a moment, and wakes to the pain of the blow. That intuition of his, swift and sure as a woman's, had leaped to some appalling conclusions during the last ten minutes. And yet—and yet—Phoebe! little Phoebe! Those clear, childlike eyes,—that lightly laughing mouth—but here reason stabbed with her cold blade—Juliet had not so passionate a mouth as Phoebe's—Juliet who, from her moonlit balcony, could demand his intentions of her lover as calmly as her lady-mother might have done;—whether his "bent of love" were "honourable," his "purpose marriage"? While Phoebe—sickeningly sure was Owen, that, shaken by the breath of love, Phoebe would never have paused to question her lover's honour or the worthiness of his intentions.

If what he feared in that dark glare of revelation cast

by the old man's innocent garrulity,—if—what he shudderingly feared were true,—then no baser, more heartless, more cowardly scoundrel lived than his nephew, Richard Bryce.

And—as controlling himself by an effort of sheer will, he led the old man to ramble amiably on,—he was putting together, link by link, the fragile chain of circumstantial evidence; the night spent at Nelson's Gift nearly two months ago, the sudden departure of Richard within two days after; the lie about "important business"; Phoebe's look that morning when he met her driving from World's-End; the news of Richard's sailing for the East, only received by his mother that very day; Sally's eagerness to go again to Nelson's Gift in the afternoon; the anguish of Phoebe in the wood; Sally's almost fierce determination not to have a doctor. Like a scroll of some Satanic scripture, unholy and convincing, the facts and their interpretation unrolled before him.

And Phoebe meantime, lying white and broken in her bed with its blue-rose garlands, was thinking:

"There is no other way—I must get my strength—then I must kill myself."

From under her heavy lids she watched his mother, sitting in her own little wicker chair against the blue denim cushions that she had made herself. How tall and tired and thin she looked, folded deep in her dressing-gown of pale-blue crape, that made her sallow face seem dusky as an Indian's. How straight those great black eyes stared before her—how like, how dreadfully like, his eyes they were! And how the big jewels of her rings glittered in the draughty candle-light where her hands were clasped together upon her thin knees. Was she praying? Phoebe shivered through all her spent nerves. If she were praying it must be to some evil power, for those black eyes might have been the eyes of Job's wife when she bade him curse God and die.

His mother—in her room. His mother, knowing all her shame, ready to protect her in order that *he* might not suffer the consequences of her shame. "I must kill myself—I must kill myself——" she thought. "And I must do it surely—I must not be saved—I must not make a mistake."

Feverishly her thoughts quested, seeking the surest way. There was no pistol in the house—laudanum? She might

take an overdose, and so fail of her aim. She swam too well to drown herself—she had heard that people who could swim did so in spite of their desire for death the instant that the water was about them. Suddenly her heart checked, then laboured painfully. She had thought of it! She had thought of a sure way! In the store-room was a quart of chloroform kept for emergencies on the farm. She would make a sack of some stout material,—then with the quart of chloroform and her bath-sponge, she would go far into the Mountain Woods—very far,—where she could not be found for days. She would soak the sponge in the chloroform, put it in the sack, then lie down and fasten the sack tightly over her head. "But I must get strong first. I must make her think I will mind all that she says."

And from under her heavy lids, and thick, short lashes, she watched Sally, sitting there so motionless in the little wicker chair, with her black eyes smouldering darkly, and her thin, jewelled fingers clasped on her thin knees.

XX

AFTER supper, which to Mr. Nelson's great relief was excellent, though plain, the old gentleman pleaded so earnestly to be allowed to see Phoebe, if only for a few moments, that Sally told him he might go and sit by her till she came back, if he would not talk to her or let her talk to him. When he had gone upstairs, she turned to her brother, saying:

"Now, Owen," and led the way into the green-panelled room.

Sally, while she had sat brooding in Phoebe's wicker-chair, had determined on her course of action. She knew that the girl's secret would be as safe with Owen as though buried in a depthless sea, and she had decided to tell him that Phoebe had confided her tragic secret to her, and that her lover was a Virginian whom she had known for some years, and whose name she preferred not to tell, as he had died suddenly, a day or two ago. This would account for Phoebe's despair, and would also prevent Owen from taking steps to discover the man's name and trying to force him to marry Phoebe. But when she found herself alone

with Owen, and lifted her eyes with schooled calmness to his face, she saw that the hard expression had left it and that he only looked profoundly sad and rather older than usual.

"I've come to explain whatever you think necessary," she said gently.

"Thank you, Sally," he replied, "but I've been having a long talk with the old man. Many things have become clearer to me. I am sorry if I was abrupt just now. My great anxiety and the shock of the whole thing must be my excuse. Mr. Nelson tells me that aversion from doctors comes to Phoebe directly from her mother. It's a singular prejudice to inherit, but such things have no rules. . . ."

He was not looking at her as he said this, but at Phoebe's grey kitten, which had sprung upon his knee and was playing with the buttons of his waistcoat. Sally thanked God that he had not been looking at her. The blood surged into her face, and she felt her lips twitching in spite of her efforts to control them,—so violent was the reaction from the most poignant dread to this unexpected relief.

She was silent just long enough to get her voice perfectly under command, then said quietly:

"I think that you will see for yourself tomorrow how much better Phoebe is. She is quite composed now, and drank some milk and wine I mixed for her very obediently and sweetly."

"Yes,—she has a lovely nature," said Owen a little hoarsely.

It was natural, he felt, that Sally should wish to keep from him the horror of Richard's act, yet that she should set herself deliberately to deceive him after all these years of close companionship cut him to the heart.

"Shall you stay here tonight?" asked Sally, dreading silence.

"Yes, Mr. Nelson has offered to put me up. And if there should be any change for the worse, if you should decide to have a doctor, after all, I can get Patton more quickly than a farm-hand on some old plug could."

"That's very, very kind of you, Owen. It will be a great comfort to feel that you're in the house."

Owen laid the squirming kitten on its back in one of his big hands, and stroked its little pear-shaped stomach, while it caught his forefinger in both paws and pretended to

bite it. "Do you think that I can see Phoebe tomorrow?" he asked, still with his eyes on the kitten.

"I . . . well . . ." hesitated Sally. "It might excite her too much. But if she wants to see you, . . . perhaps."

"We're great friends, Phoebe and I," said he, and again his voice was a little hoarse.

"Yes . . . I think you might see her, as she knows you so well," hurried Sally, anxious to conciliate him in every way possible. "It might divert her from thinking too much of her own . . . feelings." She had been on the point of saying "troubles," and bit her lip, glancing sharply at him, but the kitten still claimed his attention.

"Thanks. I wish very much to see the child. But don't you think the old gentleman has been with her long enough? Hadn't you better go back now?"

Sally rose with alacrity, and the brother and sister clasped hands for good night.

"If you need me, I shall be in the room at the head of the stairs," said Owen, and as he said this it seemed to Sally that a shadow passed over his face. But the next instant she decided that the strain of the past three or four hours had made her fanciful. All the way upstairs she kept saying in her heart, "Thank God! Thank God!" After all, he was not really suspicious,—only upset by the shock. And she had a wild longing to get to some corner quite by herself, where she could ease the stricture in her throat by a fit of weeping.

The next morning, while she was taking her coffee seated by Phoebe's bed, she said to her:

"My child, you had better call me 'Cousin Sally'; it will seem more natural if you are going away with me for a long trip. It will explain our relations clearly."

"Yes, Cousin Sally," said Phoebe obediently.

"And, Phoebe, I want you to try to be as quiet and composed as you can. I am really your friend. I want you to lean on me."

"Yes . . . thank you, Cousin Sally," said Phoebe. She wished to please, to inspire confidence, so that Sally should not be afraid to leave her to herself, while they were preparing to go away. She dreaded more than anything that Sally should insist on taking her back to World's-End, and so interfere with her plan about the chloroform. But even that should not stop her. She would kill herself; though to accomplish it she had to leap from the train over

some high trestle or embankment on her way to the seaside.

Sally rose and put down the little tray on which the coffee had been served. Then she came back and seated herself on the low bed, taking Phoebe's hand in both hers.

"Listen, my child," she said.

"Yes," said Phoebe, looking up at her wearily, but submissively.

"I want you to keep this thought before you. It will give you strength. I am determined that Richard shall marry you when he returns from the East. I have a strong will, Phoebe. You can rest assured that Richard will marry you."

"Yes," said Phoebe again, but she was thinking now that no will on earth was so strong as the will in her which had determined that she would die rather than live after the wrong that she had suffered, or become the wife of a man who had treated her as Richard had done. There was no confusion now in her feeling towards him. She hated him with a hatred in direct inverse ratio to what had been her passionate love. She hated him so utterly and so bitterly that those black eyes which resembled his, and which looked very kindly at her this morning, were loathsome to her. When Sally touched her with her hot, thin hands it was by the supremest effort that she restrained herself from shrinking physically.

"Now," said Sally, pleased with the girl's perfect docility, "we understand each other. I feel that we can be good friends. I confess that at first I felt very bitterly towards you, but I hope I'm a just woman. When I had thought things over I saw that the chief wrongdoing was Richard's —though it was a dreadful, dreadful thing to happen, Phoebe—and may ruin Richard's career. Unless, perhaps," she added, looking at the girl keenly, "you will let yourself be guided by me in the future, as you are doing now."

"I am sorry. . . . I will try to please you," said Phoebe.

"Then there may be hope for us all three," said Sally. "It looks black enough now, but there may be hope."

Phoebe said nothing this time. She looked at Sally's face, which had grown absent and almost forbidding in its dark gravity, and for the first time she wondered, "What does she mean to do with . . . the child?"

A fierce, new feeling leaped to life in Phoebe. That poor little child would never be born, she was sure; yet if it were to be, through some mischance of fate, did this woman think that she, or any other being, would have the strength to take it from her?

Under the smooth bedclothes she clenched her hands, with their broad, strong little palms and slight, pointed fingers,—while the blood stormed into her white face.

Sally noticed the bright flush and, drawing the bedclothes a little higher, said:

"But we're talking too much for your strength. Lie quite still now and try to take a nap." And, going over to the window, she seated herself again in the wicker chair, with the portfolio from her dressing-bag upon her knees, and began a long letter to Richard, into which she poured some of the pent bitterness that was corroding her.

When Sally had returned to Phoebe the night before, Owen settled the old gentleman comfortably with his manuscripts, and said that he would have a pipe outside.

He walked for a long time up and down the little flagged path that divided Phoebe's garden from the lower lawn. In the warm darkness he could hear the regular, crisp, tearing sound of a horse grazing. It was "Killdee," who had been turned on the lawn for the night. Owen, who had handled her when a tiny, tip-toe foal, called softly, and with a "quhirr" of inquiry she ceased grazing,—then, after a short sniffing halt, came up to him. He took her gently by the forelock, and played with her soft muzzle,—Phoebe's horse, care-free and mildly lawless in the summer night, a creature blithely beyond reach of moral questions, while Phoebe herself lay shattered because unwittingly she had snapped one of the invisible bonds that hold in place a code of ethics. He sighed heavily, releasing the mare, who returned to her grazing, moving slowly as she cropped.

And walking to and fro, his pipe, long smoked out, still between his teeth, Owen pondered with dull pain on the dreadful situation which had been revealed to him.

He had led Sally to believe that his suspicions were allayed for several reasons; foremost was his determination neither to share nor to discuss Phoebe's pitiful secret with any one. That he and Sally should sit down calmly to talk over the plight of the young girl seemed to him revolting. And he thought of Phoebe as a poor, little prisoner of hope,

and Sally as her tolerant but fiercely resolved gaoler, risking everything in order to shield the son who had brought dishonour upon her. Somehow it seemed to him pathetic and wretched beyond words that the vivid, wilful young creature he remembered should now be merely a bit of broken jetsam in Sally's thin, harsh grasp. And what did Sally intend doing? What were her plans? . . . The child . . . he shivered in the warm air . . . the child, . . . little Phoebe's child, . . . what had she planned to do with that? Here was a dreadful question. A something, twined with the roots of his being, thrilled painfully at the thought that her child might be taken from Phoebe . . . cast into the convenient deep of anonymity. That, he felt sure, was what Sally would wish to do. But it should never be. Only how to prevent it? How to stand between Phoebe and these terrible consequences without telling Sally that he had divined all? How to shield Phoebe without searing her with the fact of his knowledge? He seemed to be in an *impasse,* black and thick as the night and impenetrable as a jungle. Yet there must be a clue—he would come upon it if only he groped patiently enough.

To and fro he walked, to and fro, and the sound of "Killdee" grazing came as regular as heart-beats.

At ten o'clock he returned to the house and lighted the old man's bedroom candle for him, escorting him to his door on the way to his own room.

As he entered the "guest chamber" he stood with his candle held low, looking about him with repulsion. Richard had slept in this room on . . . that night. He turned with a shudder from the bed with its honey-comb spread and square pillows, and, opening wide the shutters as Richard had done, sat down by the window. The same scent of brown Windsor soap that had harassed Richard stole about him.

He sat frowning, his arms folded tightly, gazing out at the downy blackness. As soon as the house was quiet he would go and lie on the sofa in the library

The next morning about ten o'clock Sally returned to Phoebe's room after a walk with Owen in the garden.

"Owen wants very much to see you, Phoebe. Do you care to see him? Are you strong enough?"

The colour rushed into Phoebe's face, then back again, leaving her painfully white. She closed her eyes for a second, and one corner of her mouth trembled.

"Don't trouble if you feel too weak. Owen will understand perfectly," said Sally kindly, relieved to think that the girl would not be able to see him, after all.

Phoebe opened her eyes quickly, and they were bright and scared like the eyes of a bird that one holds, no matter how discreetly, in one's hand, . . . but there was a little, timid half smile on her lips, touching in its wistfulness.

"I'd love to see Cousin Owen," she said.

Sally went to fetch him.

Owen came quickly, his dark face eager and brimming with tenderness, though he had tried hard to compose it to an ordinary expression on entering. His big figure in his crash riding clothes seemed to fill the little room. When he saw Phoebe's face, so childish and wan, between the bright braids that Sally had plaited afresh that morning and laid out over the pillow, tears sprang to his eyes in spite of himself.

"Little Phoebe . . . dear child," he said, drawing up a chair and taking the pale little hand that she extended silently in both his big brown ones.

Sally had seated herself by the window and was gazing out at Hollybrook Wood.

Phoebe lay and smiled at Owen, but her lips quivered so that she could not speak at first. He just sat quietly, stroking the slight hand that he held and smiling back at her.

"How . . . how is Wizzy?" she managed finally.

"Wizzy is in fine feather. Would you like him to call on you?"

"Yes," said Phoebe. Somehow Wizzy seemed the only natural, friendly thought that had come to her in long, dark ages. "Will you bring him some time, Cousin Owen? . . . ."

"This very afternoon, if you like," said Owen. He was wondering why that little peak of soft hair on her lovely forehead should seem to him the most touching thing he had ever looked at. Where the heavy curves turned back from her face there was a little dusting of golden down that lay on her white brow like pollen on a lily leaf.

"A child . . . just a child herself," thought Owen, his heart wrung within him, . . . and he thought of Richard with a throe of rage.

"Sally is going to stay with you another night, and

David can bring Wizzy in the trap that fetches her some things that she needs."

Did he fancy it, or did Phoebe's slight fingers cling closer to his as he mentioned that Sally would stop another night with her? . . . But she only said:

"Yes, Cousin Sally is so kind," and she saw that Sally glanced approvingly at her when she spoke of her as "Cousin Sally" to Owen.

"We must be sure, though, that Jimmy Toots is safely shut up," said Owen. "Wizzy has a wholesome terror of Mr. Toots."

"He's in his cage all the time now," said Phoebe, a little sadly, Owen thought. "He was very naughty and bit Cousin Sally. He's very jealous."

"Poor Jimmy!" said Owen. "Where is he?"

"There," said Phoebe, pointing.

"Can't we have him out for a bit, Sally?" asked her brother. "I'll watch him."

"He's really very savage with me, Owen."

"Oh, but he likes me. . . . I'll watch him," said Owen, and getting up he released the crow, who with an exultant caw flew straight to the foot of Phoebe's bed, fluffed out all his feathers with a vigorous shake, then smoothed himself to a glossy sleekness, and, hopping down, began to walk solemnly up the slender body outlined by the Marseilles quilt. He nestled down finally against her cheek, and began to nibble her ear.

"Dear Jimmy," said Phoebe, stroking him. "Dear Jimmy," and then suddenly, without warning, she began to cry bitterly.

"Don't . . . don't," pleaded Owen, wiping away the tears with his big handkerchief, which almost hid her little face from view.

"Sally won't let me stay if you cry, dear. She won't let me come again. . . . Please, dear, please."

Phoebe caught the big, gentle hand, and held it tight against her face. She checked her tears by a violent effort, but he felt the brush of her thick lashes against his palm as she blinked away the blinding drops. His heart ached with pity. He would have liked to gather her up against his breast and comfort her as a mother does a child.

"I think you'd really better go now, Owen," came Sally's quiet voice from the window.

Phoebe's eyes were closed. She made no sign to detain him.

"I'll come again tomorrow, dear," he said, rising.

"Please," he heard her whisper.

XXI

THE day following was a Tuesday, and, as Mary arrived Wednesday afternoon, Sally was obliged to return to World's-End to receive her. However, the girl was so much better that she felt no anxiety in leaving her for a little while, though she was slightly nervous, too, because Owen had said that he intended to remain at Nelson's Gift until evening, in order "to cheer Phoebe up a little and see that Wizzy and Jimmy Toots did not come to clips."

Phoebe came down at nine o'clock, and the exertion of dressing had brought the "two little blushes" to her cheeks again. To Owen her eyes looked fearfully large and bright, but Sally seemed to think that she was very well for the time being, and went off, promising to bring Mary back with her on Thursday.

When the carriage had driven off with Sally, Owen turned to Phoebe, who was seated listlessly on one of the hall chairs, and said:

"Now, little cousin, don't you think you might come out into your garden if I gave you my arm?"

"Not the garden . . ." said Phoebe, and he saw a little shiver run through her.

"Into the air, at all events," he coaxed. "It's such a wonderful morning. We'll take Jimmy Toots or Wizzy, —whichever you prefer of those two implacables—and go under the big tulip-tree near the rose-hedge. Won't you?"

"We'll take dear Wizzy," said Phoebe, "he's so unhappy when he isn't with you."

Owen drew her hand through his arm, and they went slowly out together into the serene morning, so fresh and breeze-stirred for July. "You must have some cushions," he said when they reached the tulip-tree, and he went back to the house for them.

Phoebe sat on the warm, sun-burnt grass, and leaned against the great bole, looking after him. The colour burnt deeper in her cheeks, then left them wholly. She had

thought, "How kind, how kind he is! Would he be kind to me . . . if he knew?"

"There! What do you mean by getting pale again?" exclaimed Owen, as he came back with the cushions of the library sofa and made her sit upon one while he tucked the other behind her.

"I wish I could take you away with me to some lovely place in France or Italy and pet you into health again," he continued, looking at her with his affectionate hazel eyes. "You would answer beautifully to spoiling, I'm sure."

This was almost too much for Phoebe . . . the contrast of what he had said with what he would surely say if . . . he knew. She drooped her head and played with a stalk of grass without answering. "Poor little child! Poor little, desolate, helpless child!" thought Owen, divining her simple thoughts.

He, like Sally, was resolved that Richard should marry her, . . . and yet, . . . as he looked at that tender, drooping face with the delicate fire of youth all quenched, when he thought of the man who had done this and of the baseness and artificiality of Richard's nature, . . . it seemed to him that Phoebe's fate as Richard's wife would be even more deplorable than it was at present; and suddenly there sprang up in him a sharp revulsion from the thought of handing her over bound by legal ties to her seducer.

"There is something wrong with us all," he thought bitterly. "Here is a beautiful young creature about to become a mother, and instead of an exulting reverence we feel shame and pity, just because the law has not set its approval upon her act. She has only followed the instinct of a dryad in spring-time, . . . and she sits there, disgraced, wretched, her life in ruins."

Phoebe glanced up, feeling the spell of his eyes that dwelt on her so earnestly, so thoughtfully. The colour waved again over her white face. "Why are you so good to me, Cousin Owen?" she asked, with a touch of her old impulsiveness.

"Because I'm fond of you, Phoebe," he answered gently, "and because you are very sweet and lovable."

Phoebe put up her hands to her face, and this gesture twisted Owen's heart-strings.

He grew pale, and then he, too, gave way to impulse.

He put his hand gently over the little hands that hid her face.

"I'm very fond of you, dear," he said again, "and nothing, nothing in all the world, . . . nothing that you or anyone else might do, could ever change my affection for you."

"Oh, no . . . no . . ." wailed the girl from behind her sheltering fingers, and it was like a faint echo of that terrible cry in the wood, which still haunted him.

"Nothing, Phoebe," he repeated firmly; "absolutely nothing."

Suddenly Phoebe caught his hand in both hers, and held it to her breast. Her wild, wide eyes gazed at him piteously.

"I'm afraid . . ." she whispered. "I'm so afraid. . . ."

Owen was startled. She so evidently spoke aloud, without knowing that she had spoken.

"Of what, dear?" he asked gently.

She still stared at him, . . . then her look broke, dropped away from his.

"I . . . I was just . . . thinking," she faltered.

"Well, you mustn't think too much. You haven't quite recovered from that faint in the woods. Shall I tell you some stories of my travels, as Othello told Desdemona? . . . I'm big and brown enough to play the Moor."

"Yes . . . please," said Phoebe.

So he leaned on his elbow, while Wizzy lay in a blissful demi-doze against his adored boot, only rousing now and then to have a snap at the cloud of gnats that swarmed near. He told her of Hungary, and Russia, and Turkestan, and of strange Punjabi customs, and of how he had been tempted to shoot big game in India, but had desisted because of the look he had once seen in a dying stag's eyes, so that he determined never again to destroy a living creature. And here Phoebe looked at him through sudden tears and said:

"I think you have the most beautiful heart in the world." Owen stopped short, hot to his ears. It seemed just as though he had been making a bid for her admiration, but really he had only been moved by the desire to tell her something which he knew would fit her mood.

"Don't, Phoebe," he said boyishly; "you make me

ashamed to have told you. Most decent men feel like that nowadays."

"The best, kindest heart in the whole world," said Phoebe again, with a touch of her old wilfulness and smiling slightly through her tears. "If all men were . . ." She broke off, and again her face whitened and drooped toward her young breast.

Owen plunged afresh into his traveller's tales. After an hour, noticing how worn she looked all at once, he said that she had better go and lie down until dinner time, and he took both her hands, pulling her gently up from the grass, and then, keeping one upon his arm as when they had come out, led her back to the house.

When he went out to mount The Clown late that afternoon, Phoebe followed him. She was flushed again now, and, her eyes, darkly glowing, had a curious, fateful look that disturbed him. She stood silent while he mounted; then, coming close, laid her hand on The Clown's neck. Her dark, burning eyes were fixed upon his face.

"I want to thank you," she said. "I want to thank you, and I don't know how. . . . But it's all here. . . ." She put her hands passionately to her breast. "Please, Cousin Owen, always remember that it's here . . . here in my heart. . . ."

"Why, Phoebe dear," protested Owen, trying to take it lightly, "one would think I was off for a long journey!"

"No . . . I just wanted to say it," she answered with her wistful smile.

Owen rode off with a troubled, anxious feeling that he could not account for. The nearer he got to World's-End the more this feeling increased.

Suddenly, under an intuitive impulse not to be denied, when he was in sight of the very gates, he pulled The Clown's head sharply round, and rode back to Nelson's Gift at a smart pace.

When he reached it he swung down, tied The Clown to a bough, and rapped with his crop-handle on the front door.

Lily came sauntering, a mild surprise in her bovine eyes as she saw who it was.

"Can I speak to Miss Phoebe a moment?" asked Owen.

"Miss Phoebe, she done gone out."

"Where?"

"I dunno, suh."

"When?"

"'Bout ten minutes ago, I reckon."

Owen turned abruptly, and ran up the sloping lawn at the side of the house, from whence one had a pretty clear view of the surrounding fields. He looked in vain at first; then he saw her, a little figure in a long, dark cape, moving steadily up a grassy shoulder towards Idler's Mountain. His heart in his throat, he knew not why, he set out after her, still running.

She was walking with her head bent, evidently absorbed in her own thoughts, for she did not look round at the noise of pursuing feet, and when, at last close to her, he called "Phoebe!" she started with a wild cry, and something that she had been carrying under her cape fell at her feet and broke. The next instant the air was full of the dead-sweet, pungent odour of chloroform.

Phoebe, white as death, her hands to her heart, trembling from head to foot, stood wildly staring at him above the broken bottle.

"Phoebe!" cried Owen; then, as the truth rushed on him, "Oh, *Phoebe!*" he cried again, and snatched her roughly up in his arms, as though snatching her from some hideous peril.

The girl struggled desperately to speak with coherence. Even in this hour of unexpected detection she clung madly to her purpose. She must mislead him, beguile him in some way. If she did not, they would never trust her alone again, . . . she would never be able to escape.

"I was . . . I was . . . I was going, . . ." she stammered painfully.

Owen set her gently down, keeping his arm about her. He was whiter now than she was. "Yes, dear, yes? . . . Well?" he said, trying to follow her mood.

"I was going . . . to take it . . . for a horse that . . . that broke his leg. A horse up . . . up in the mountain."

A profound instinct told Owen to let her think him deceived.

"Well, dear, don't worry. . . . We can get some more," he said, soothing her. "I'm sorry I gave you such a start, but I just remembered something I wanted to tell you." His brain worked like lightning. "I thought perhaps that while you were still feeling so weak you would rather not see Mary for a few days. So I just turned back to tell you that I could manage it perfectly for you without hurting Mary's feelings."

"Thank you. . . ." whispered the girl.

She could scarcely stand upon her feet, even with his arm round her. Suddenly she clung to him with all her might, clutching him with both hands, pressing her face against his breast. "Oh, I'm afraid . . . I'm afraid . . ." she stammered. "Don't leave me! . . . Don't let her take me. . . . You are . . . are . . . the only . . . the only one I'm not afraid of. Don't leave me . . . don't leave me. . . ."

Holding the convulsed figure close against him, . . . pressing her head to him with a hand on the thick, loosened hair, . . . shivering with pity and a sick dread of what might have been had he not turned back, . . . Owen felt suddenly within him a wild light such as breaks sometimes through the blackest storm. It blinded him for a moment, . . . shook all his manhood with its sudden, appalling brightness of solution. Then, bending his head close to hers, he said:

"I'll never leave you, Phoebe, if you wish it. Listen, dear, . . . don't be frightened. Could you . . . Will you marry me, Phoebe?"

Clinging to him closer than ever, her little fingers clenched in the stuff of his coat, she went on pleading desperately, "Don't leave me! . . . Don't leave me!" She had not taken in a word of what he had said. And Owen, dreading the consequences of this frantic reaction from one ghastly terror to another, . . . the recoil from the terror of death to the terror of life, . . . soothed her as best he could, half lifting her from the ground in his effort to give physical support to her poor body, shaken as by an ague with throes of unreasoning fear.

Little by little, coaxing, scolding gently now and then as with a panic-stricken child, he got her to a fallen log, and seating himself upon it, with Phoebe still clinging to him, held her against his side and smoothed the tangled hair away from her wet forehead. She grew quite still after a few minutes, catching her breath convulsively now and then, like a child after a fit of sobbing. And the little face, so white, so piteous, thrown back in abandonment upon his arm, with closed eyelids quivering like the wings of birds clumsily shot and dying painfully in helpless terror, moved Owen as nothing had moved him since that far-off day of his mother's burial. Love and pity in their purest forms filled him as he looked down at Phoebe's

wan face and smoothed away from it the rich hair so strangely contrasting in its vivid brilliancy and vigorous, super-abundant life.

He did not reason about what he meant to do. It came as an overpowering instinct,—the instinct to lift this lovely, stricken child out of the dark waters that were submerging her into the safety of his love and tenderness. And even through his immense pity he felt a leap of exultation as he thought how he could change all for her, . . . rescue her from her own fears, from Sally, from the dastard who had betrayed her, from fate itself, . . . could set her in a sure refuge, and give her, if not happiness, at least peace and, in time, content. And, as he was very human, the thought also flared through him, "In time . . . perhaps love." But he shook this thought angrily from him, stung by the consciousness of a certain baseness that seemed always to mingle with the highest human motives. Yet she was made for love—had he the right, taking advantage of her extremity, to shut her forever in the cold house of grateful affection? And at the thought of her gratitude a coldness flowed through his uplifted mood. Long years spent with a wife who gave him gratitude. . . . And Phoebe's was a passionately grateful nature. . . . And he was a man to whom tepidity in such relations had always seemed revolting. What if he should come to love her with that force of passion which he knew well was latent in him? The future, like a great threatening form, drew close and thrust aside the present. But then he looked down again at Phoebe, and all doubts gave way before the appeal of her unconscious face,—the helpless weight of her spent body against his breast.

"Phoebe dear," he said, when he thought that she had recovered enough to understand him, "I want you to listen to me quietly. You will, won't you, dear?"

For answer she lifted her heavy lids, and looked up at him, and the trust in those dark eyes thrilled his heart with something more than love, deeper than pity.

"You trust me, don't you, Phoebe?"

She groped for his hand, her eyes still on his, and quickly, before he guessed what she would do, kissed it with a little humble kiss, cold as ice.

Owen flushed, and tears sprang to his eyes.

"Could you trust yourself quite to me, dear? . . . I am far, far older than you, but I would be very good to you,

little Phoebe. If you would be my wife"—his heart seemed to pause in spite of his absolute decision—"I would take you away with me and make you well again."

A wild, faint smile stirred the little face. Phoebe thought that her friend was jesting with her to divert her from her suffering.

"No . . . no . . . Phoebe . . ." he said, holding her tighter, "don't smile. . . . I am in earnest. . . . I want you to let me marry you. . . . I want to make you well and happy again. Don't you think you could be happy with me if you tried very hard, Phoebe dear?"

And this time he smiled at her in his turn. She stared up at him with wide eyes, in which was sheer amazement, then dread again. Suddenly she struggled to rise, and he loosed his arms, leaving her quite free.

"I don't want you, dear, unless you want to come to me," he said gently.

Phoebe's lips parted, but no words would come. She sank beside him, and hid her face against his knee. Her long hair fell over her just as in pictures of the repentant Magdalene. Owen frowned, and gathered it from about her hidden face. And suddenly a wild hope leaped in him. "If she would only confide in me. . . . If she would only tell me, then all would be clear and simple." But the next instant he felt that this hope was folly. Always lenient to human weakness in others, always moved by a passion of pity before the pitiful,—that disarming chivalric tenderness of his feeling for Phoebe made it impossible for him to bring stern codes to bear on her; he, the man, could only feel how little and helpless and wronged she was. Who could expect such a child to lay bare to the man who had just done her the greatest honour in his power the fact of her own dishonour? Who could expect her to shut the last door of escape with her own hands. Besides, young and childish as she was, there was in her that gift of passionate gratitude which might prevent her from accepting his offer, if she knew that compassion had prompted it. And yet . . . he felt that it would be a triumphantly beautiful thing if she could force herself to tell him all.

Kneeling there with her face hidden against his knee, Phoebe seemed to herself to be rushing round and round between high walls in utter, vacant darkness. This must be one of the wild, confused dreams that had troubled her so sorely of late. It was not true, of course. Perhaps she

had really taken the chloroform, after all, and was dying, and this was one of the dreams that came with death. She had heard people say that chloroform gives strange, queerly real dreams.

But presently Owen's quiet voice breaking through the tumult of her thoughts made her quite sure somehow that it was not in a dream that he spoke to her.

"I love you very dearly, Phoebe darling," it said.

The blinding truth! He loved her . . . he wanted to marry her . . . Phoebe began to tremble with a new trembling,—and suddenly the bitter tears came.

"I can't . . . I can't. . . ." she whispered so low that he could not make out the words.

Owen bent over and lifted her to his side again.

"Will you, dear?" he said, and, as on the day when she had begun to weep under "Jimmy Toots'" caresses, he took out his big handkerchief and wiped away the tears that made all her white little face glisten as with rain.

"No, no . . . I can't . . . You wouldn't want me if . . . no . . . no . . . I love you too much. . . ."

"Dear heart, that's an odd reason for not marrying me."

"Oh, I can't . . . I can't . . . I can't," she kept piteously repeating.

"Are you afraid of me, dear?"

"Oh, no . . . no . . ."

"You said just now that you loved me."

"Ah, I do! . . . I do!"

"Then Phoebe . . .?"

"I can't let you marry me . . . I . . . I . . . no one is worthy to be your wife."

"Dear child, that is very sweet nonsense, but it *is* nonsense. Look, dear,—this is my mother's engagement ring. If you'll let me I'll put it on your finger now."

He slipped from his watch chain the little ring of old green enamel, with its bands of brilliants and emeralds set like roses, and held it towards her. "It will just fit, I think," he said, smiling very tenderly into her scared eyes, where a sort of doubtful, troubled hope was beginning to shine. "My mother had little hands like yours, dear."

This ring seemed to Phoebe like the wonderful talisman of legend. Once on her hand, all the world would be transformed. She sat gazing at it, her tears checked, her heart beating wildly. She dared not . . . it would be dreadful,

wicked beyond words, to put on his mother's ring . . . to let him marry her . . . her of all the world. She dared not. She would not do this wicked, wicked thing . . . and yet, there on that brown palm so lovingly extended to her, lay the magic that would turn dishonour into honour,—a world of menace into a world of safety. His wife . . . his wife . . . Owen Randolph's wife . . . safe, shielded, loved, cherished. Then suddenly a little voice, fine as a hair, began speaking as it were within her brain: "You forget," said this tiny, piercing voice,—for surely it was not herself thinking—"you forget—your Cousin Owen does not look on such faults as yours as the world looks. Don't you remember how kindly he spoke of that poor farm-girl who was betrayed? Yes—yes. Remember that. He doesn't condemn sins such as yours as the world does. He spoke pityingly of poor Jessie—forgivingly. *If he knew all he would surely forgive you.* Why tell him to give him pain, when he would forgive you in any case? . . ."

On and on went this voice, and Phoebe listened to it like one tranced, her eyes upon the little ring in which lay salvation. And now the voice melted into her own thought. . . . "He would forgive me if he knew. . . . Why hurt him by telling him? . . . He would forgive me. . . . He would forgive me. . . ."

In the wild fever and confusion of her mind she overlooked the most vital point of all—the terrible fact that, in consenting to marry Owen, she would be consenting to his belief that her child would be also his. Yes, strange as it may seem, in her bewilderment and torture this dreadful consequence of her possible yielding escaped her altogether. But she thought of Sally's black, resolute eyes . . . and her heart shook within her . . . Richard's face flashed before her, and shame dissolved her. She threw herself on the ground near his feet and broke into a storm of sobbing.

Owen lifted her again. He felt that the time had come to check these rending outbursts of emotion. "Phoebe," he said, feigning a sternness that was far from his heart, which felt sore with pity; "do you mean that you wish me to go away and not come here any more?"

And at this dire question the girl started and stiffened in his arms as though he had stabbed her. "Well, then, either I must go away . . . for good . . . or you must tell me that you will marry me."

"Oh, no . . . no, Cousin Owen! . . . I couldn't bear it . . . I couldn't bear it. . . . Oh, I am so afraid again!"

"You don't love me, after all?"

"Yes, yes. . . . Oh, more than anyone. . . ."

"Then hold out your hand, sweetheart."

The girl shuddered violently. He heard her teeth chattering in spite of her tightly clenched jaws. Suddenly she thrust out to him her little hand, shaking as with palsy. He slipped the ring home on her finger, then kissed it softly.

XXII

OWEN went straight to Sally's room when he returned to World's-End. She was dressing for dinner, but said, "Wait a minute," and, slipping on a wrapper, opened the door for him. He had rarely of late years seen his sister with her hair down, and now the black, thick locks, lightly touched with grey, that hung about her face gave it an unnatural look. He came in, and, standing near her dressing-table, took up one of the ivory boxes, examining the "Nag's head" on it as though he had never before seen that aristocratic little animal. He did not believe in the theory of softening bad news to people, and yet he felt that what he was about to tell her would be so overwhelming that he delayed the moment involuntarily, his heart beating like a boy's about to confess some misdemeanour to a not over-indulgent mother. She stood looking at him, a dread suspense in her eyes. She was very pale.

"Sally," he said suddenly, putting down the little box and turning to her, "what I'm going to tell you will be a shock to you . . . but there's no use doling out such things. I'm going to be married . . . to Phoebe Nelson."

Sally went white as bone. Her lips parted, and she stood gazing at him without a word.

"I know how you must feel," he went on, beginning to walk up and down the room. "It's so unexpected . . . so against my theories . . . but then I was never a consistent person, Sally, as you know." He smiled at her rather wryly, but there came no answering smile to Sally's face. "I've never yet found an 'ist' or 'ite' or 'ic' that would label me exactly. . . . Just a blundering poor devil going at things the best way I knew how. . . . Now I've blundered into marriage . . . but I love Phoebe very dearly."

He was saying more than he wished, and more than he had meant to, but Sally's stark, dumfounded face seemed to call for some veil of words to cover its nakedness. Blank amazement, rage, scorn, ruthlessness, all were in her black, steady gaze. Her likeness to Richard became startling.

Suddenly she sat down sideways in the nearest chair, and, gripping its back with both hands till the knuckles whitened, shook back her loose hair and gave a short, harsh laugh.

"Don't . . ." said Owen involuntarily, putting out his hand. This laugh struck him as dreadful.

"Since when . . ." began Sally; she moistened her dry lips. "Since when have you felt the tender passion?"

Owen went toward the door.

"I do not understand your attitude," he said coldly.

There had been something ferocious both in that laugh and the sneer of her question; he felt that he looked on a woman he had never known. He had never glimpsed the tigress of maternity in Sally, as Mary had once done. That she was thinking of Richard, and of the dark secret which she could not tell him, he knew well,—but he did not realise that her chief fury lay in the fact of his marrying at all, not of his marrying the victim of Richard's wanton egoism. He had not yet taken in the full consequences that would result for Richard and for Sally herself from his marriage with anyone.

But Sally had conned them over one by one for years. "The thing that she greatly feared was come upon her," and she thirsted to strike as she had been stricken. And yet she was as helpless as some spider meshed in its own vitals. Were she to tell him all, Richard's disinheritance would be doubly sure. Now, at least, for sheer decency's sake he would have to provide properly for him in his will, though the great fortune which she had come to look upon only as a trust for Richard, temporarily in Owen's hands, would inevitably pass to the children of the latter. . . . A blast of fire seemed to strike her here . . . it was Richard's own child that would take his place! . . . That child, begotten in a moment of May madness, would have all of which Richard was to be dispossessed. For a second Sally felt that this terrible fire in her heart and brain was madness. Yet she must control herself. All was irrevocably lost if she did not control herself.

"Wait. . . . Wait, Owen," she stammered, the smile

with which she tried to veil the look of rapacious cruelty on her face distorting it to a singular ugliness. "My joke was in bad taste . . . but it was only a joke. . . . I'm . . ." She swallowed. "I'm sorry if I offended you."

He came back slowly.

"I'm going to ask you," he said, "not to be sarcastic with Phoebe when you see her."

A strange look flickered over Sally's face, despite all her fiercely set will. She rose, and taking up a brush began brushing out her hair so that its thickness came between her and his cold look.

"I don't think you need have said that," she remarked, turning his request shrewdly against himself. "I have tried my poor best to be kind to the girl."

She could not have uttered Phoebe's name then, though its absence had meant complete severance between her and Owen.

He replied in an unmoved voice:

"You have been very kind to her. But you have also been kind to me,—until today."

"It isn't like you, Owen, to harp on a mistaken jest, and treat it like a deadly offense."

"I confess that I've been deeply hurt."

"I'm sorry."

"Then there's no more to be said. We shall be married at once. I've spoken to her father. He is willing. I shall take Phoebe abroad at once. But I'm keeping you from dressing."

He went to the door again, then once more turned back.

"Please do me the favour of letting me tell Mary of this myself."

"Just as you wish, of course."

"Thanks."

He went out.

Sally let the brush fall into her lap, and sat staring at her own eyes in the mirror. The candle-light, falling from silver sconces on either side, deepened the shadows in her eye-sockets and the flat hollows of her cheeks. She saw plainly the skull under her own flesh. And she smiled now grimly enough. It was fitting that a death's-head should look back at her from her own face. The utmost calamity, short of Richard's death, had overtaken her. And, as in a fiery panorama, pictures of the detestable future unrolled before her; visions of Phoebe in her place,

in Richard's place at World's-End—Phoebe, the little, easily seduced country-girl—at the head of the table,—ordering the servants,—receiving guests. Phoebe, no longer "little Phoebe Nelson," but Mrs. Owen Randolph, of World's-End. Phoebe, with a right to have the nag's head on *her* brushes,—on *her* linen! . . . Sally caught up the brush from her lap and hurled it against the wall with all her might. Some of the delicate, cream-hued plastering broke away with the impact, leaving a rough grey patch shaped like a tulip-leaf. . . . It was the act of an enraged peasant woman,—the primitive spending of rage on inanimate objects, inherited from the violent old founder of their family, and which even Owen himself had never completely outgrown.

A little sobered by her physical outbreak, Sally rose and began putting up her hair with icy, resolute fingers. She would not ring for Mirabel. She could not have restrained herself from striking had the girl made a blunder in her toilet. And as she fastened the hooks of her thin gown, tearing the delicate stuff in her nervousness, she kept swimming as it were frantically round the dark pool of her own thought, like some desperate creature fallen in a deep reservoir and seeking for some chink of egress from its steep, slippery sides.

There must be a way of stopping it. That it should go on, should accomplish itself, was impossible . . . utterly impossible. She thought of threatening Phoebe with a disclosure of the whole affair, but then, like a rank bit in the mouth of a vicious mare, the thought of Richard's part in it checked her. No, but she would wire Richard to come back at once, . . . better, far better that Richard should marry the little fool than that she should become Owen's wife. But no, again, it was not Phoebe, but she, *she* who had played the fool! . . . How easily she had been duped by the girl's sham of soft, listless misery! . . . And all the time, all the time that crafty little wretch, so seemingly child-like and pliable, had held to her sly purpose with a will of iron; . . . the determination to play upon one man with a cunning learned from her experience with another, and this time to make sure that marriage, not a mere fleeting moment of lawless pleasure, should be the outcome! . . . "Oh, I did well to distrust that bold, red mouth of hers!" she thought. And in her angry, distorted imagination poor Phoebe figured as a young Delilah.

"He will rue it," she thought savagely. "Oh, he will rue it to the bitter end if he marries her! . . . She will drag his name in the dust. . . . She will take the next lover that she fancies, and the next and the next!"

Then suddenly she felt a deep sense of injury, of wrathful resentment at what she chose to term Phoebe's "base ingratitude."

Yes, she really thought of Phoebe's consent to marry Owen as an act of the blackest ingratitude to her, Sally. When she had done all in her power to shield the girl, had promised her safety, had even promised that Richard should marry her. But it must be stopped. She would tell Mary everything, and together they could surely think of some plan to stop this monstrous marriage. Yet, no . . . she could not confide in Mary. Mary had never understood or rightly valued Richard. It was the one flaw in their relations with each other. Besides Phoebe was Mary's first cousin. Then, too, she could not run the risk of Mary's telling Owen. Mary had such strange ideas of candour and the perfect frankness demanded by friendship. But what to do? Any action must be quick, immediate. Why they might be going to be married tomorrow or the next day!

Sally's heart seemed to faint in her breast at this thought. If she had only a mouthful of brandy . . . but she could not endure the thought of Mirabel fussing about her. She snatched up her bottle of German cologne from the dressing-table and took a quick gulp. . . . The fiery, scented stuff almost strangled her. . . . She coughed, gasping for breath, and tears of pain ran down her face. Then the hot liquid bit into her stomach. She felt revived. It was in some novel that she had read of a woman's drinking cologne. It was true then—that it had the effect of brandy. And it struck her as odd that something read in a novel should prove of practical use.

Gathering her thoughts together as she would have gathered a wind-tossed cloak, she went down to the "rose room."

Owen was standing by the open window dressed for dinner. They went side by side, in silence, out into the West Portico, where breakfast and dinner were always served at World's-End during the summer and late spring.

The cologne, or possibly her own fiery will, had certainly steadied Sally's nerves.

She said quite naturally as they sat down:

"I suppose the old gentleman is delighted?"

"He is pleased, I think," said Owen. "I fancy that he has worried a great deal about what Phoebe's fate would be when he died—and he has a liking for me."

"He would have, of course. You've been awfully good to them both."

"I'm very fond of them both."

"How long will the engagement be?"

"We shall be married next Monday and take Wednesday's steamer for Havre."

This "we" was like the sting of a whip to Sally. "'Happy's the wooing that's not long a-doing,'" she could not refrain from quoting, but she looked down at her plate as she said it, so that Owen could not see the flare of malice in her black eyes. He said nothing, however, and presently she took up the dropped thread again.

"How will she manage about a wedding-gown at such short notice?"

"There isn't to be any wedding-gown. Phoebe prefers not to have one, and I prefer it, too."

"Oh! . . ." breathed Sally. "That seem a pity, doesn't it?" she added, softening the veiled sneer of this "Oh," which she had not been able to repress.

"No. I don't think so. I've always loathed weddings and everything connected with them. A bull-fight isn't so barbarous a spectacle as a 'smart' wedding—in my eyes at least."

"Yes. . . . It does seem strange . . . for you. . . ." Sally let her words trail off, and sat gazing thoughtfully to where the Green-Flower made a shining loop at the foot of the rose-garden. The evening star hung like a great daffodil of fire just above the languid blue of the far hills.

Owen winced as she had meant him to.

"Of course the difference in our ages will make it seem a sad mistake to many people," he said. "My only excuse is that the child is fond of me, and I believe that I can make her happy . . . despite my extreme age," he added, with a rather ironical smile.

Sally did not like this smile. Men are not ironical over their own actions unless they are very sure of them. She sought in her mental armory for a subtler weapon.

"I wonder what dear Mary will say?" she then mused aloud. "How often she has told me what a pity it was that

you had never married. She said that she was afraid you never would now. And then to find that you've fallen in love with a slip of a girl . . . I do think Mary will be astonished, don't you?"

"Very likely," said Owen drily. The shaft had gone home as neatly as she could have wished.

Then Sally, in her hungry desire to wound, made a serious blunder.

"Do you know," she said thoughtfully, leaning her head on one thin hand with its heavy stones of green and red and black-blue, and playing with the spray of citronalis from her finger-bowl—"do you know I once thought that she and Richard might have a love affair?"

Owen had always felt that a certain fibre of coarseness in Sally struck through in moments of temper, but this passed all bounds. That she should link those names together before him seemed the greatest breach of all decency of soul that he had ever known. He was afraid to look at her for fear that some of his cold disgust should find its way into his eyes. He sat silent, his gaze fixed on the great star which hung over Phoebe's home, and thought with exultation of how he had rescued her from the power of this woman, who by her last speech had set herself at such an immeasurable distance from him, and whose cruel laugh when he had told her of his coming marriage still echoed painfully in his ears.

Sally had frayed with her own hands one of the slender bonds that hold together the uncongenial members of a family—the old, deep-rooted sense of affection as obligatory between children of the same parents. With a man like Owen the other bond, duty, would hold, though it chafed to the bone, but affection is no more to be commanded than passionate love, and in that moment, together with his disgust, came a sharp feeling of dislike.

He glanced at the great gems burning on his sister's sallow fingers, and remembered how sweet and girlish had looked the simple ring of enamel on Phoebe's timid, flower-white hand, and he thought how he would ask her never for his sake to deck herself with the vulgar beauty of great jewels. And, again, as he noticed something ruthless and talon-like in those sallow fingers, he wished that he and Phoebe were already standing together on the deck of the liner, with America a brown haze on the horizon.

Sally herself was frightened when she had spoken. "If

he should ever find out by any chance, he would never forgive me that speech," she told herself. And she remembered what the scriptures say about being ware of the wrath of a patient man, for Sally was a conscientious and methodical reader of the Bible.

As soon as coffee had been served Owen excused himself and withdrew to his study, saying that he had a press of matters which must be attended to at once in view of his approaching departure from America. He had never bid her good-night so coldly, or excused himself to her so formally, and Sally suffered under this, for beneath the lava waves of impotent rage and jealousy for her young burned the ofttimes choked but never wholly extinguished slow fire of real affection for her brother. She had succeeded in wounding him, if not to the full measure of her passing impulse, still sufficiently to have chilled his feeling for her, and she shivered over the too speedy result of her blind strokes with the two-edged blade of revenge.

A dreadful night she spent, tossed from impotent wrath to jealousy—from impotent jealousy back to helpless wrath. The barren pangs of unavailing anger racked her almost insufferably . . . anger against Phoebe, against Owen, against Richard, against fate (she called it "fate," but it was anger against a powerful but inactive God that Sally felt), against herself. She tossed and tossed until the blind, blank eyes of her white-curtained windows slowly opened in the dark wall.

Then she got up, and, all haggard and weary as she was, dropped on her knees by one of the open windows, and flung up desperate prayers at the cool, indifferent sky of early dawn. "Oh, my God! my God! thou art *my* God!" cried her heart like frantic David. "Set it right. Stop this dreadful thing. Forgive Richard. Send him back. Let her marry him. Let anything happen but that my brother should marry her. Oh, my God! thou art *my* God! Listen to *me!*" To this effect prayed desperate, angry-hearted Sally to the calm dawn. And in her soul was the cry of the indignant prophet of old: "Wilt Thou always be unto me as waters that fail?"

XXIII

MARY'S coming was a relief to the brother and sister, fixed there as they were in the great, lonely house with the shadow of misunderstanding and wounded feeling between them. Something sweet and briary fresh as of wholesome airs blowing over an old-time garden filled with rue, and rosemary, and thyme, was brought with Mary's atmosphere. The little dance in her grey eyes was as refreshing as the dance on running water when one goes for a dip after a sultry day.

Sally kissed her with a sense of gratitude for her presence that was almost humble for Sally.

Owen took both her hands and held them so tight that her rings bit, but she did not wince.

"Mary," said Sally, and she told the truth, "I was never so glad to see anyone in my life!"

"Mary," said Owen, "I didn't think I could get fonder of you, but at this moment I realise that my affection has grown since you stepped from the carriage."

"You dear things," said Mary, "I've missed you both dreadfully. You make me feel just as though I were coming to my very own home."

"It *is* your very own home," said Sally and Owen in the same breath. Then all three laughed.

"I never heard you and Sally so unanimous," said Mary. "Have you been quarrelling that you're so desperately glad to see me?"

And, though she did not show it, something in the air of both told her that she had unwittingly struck a very large nail directly upon the head.

"Iced tea for Mary in the West Portico!" she smiled, speaking in a little girl's voice and tucking Sally's hand beneath her arm. "Mary *so* thirsty!"

And she rattled on, telling them of absurdities that had happened during her journey and entering into lively one-sided dialogues with the dogs who came panting and wagging about her, until the little *gêne*, caused by her unconscious stroke of shrewdness, had entirely gone.

She thought that Sally looked very worn in the bright western light, and there was a tension also about Owen's face that made her sure that grave questions were stirring at World's-End.

After tea, Sally lay down in a Madeira chair on the lawn, and Owen took Mary for a stroll by the Green-Flower.

"Or," he said, as they reached the creeper-laced bank near the boat-house, "shall I punt you up to the weir?"

"Please," said Mary.

She lay back on the red cushions, watching his tall figure at the pole, and it seemed to her that her happiness was very great in just loving him as she did. She looked at the greenish sheen of the little river, in which the first faint salmon-coloured streaks of sunset were reflected, at the heavy heads of mid-summer roses nodding down to her from the garden hedge above, at the white columns of the West Portico rising from its cloud of shrubbery, at the sweet, vague peace of the drowsy sky,—and in her heart was repeated that sweet, vague peacefulness. She recalled a saying that she treasured. "He who loses his love keeps her always." Perhaps, if Owen had loved her in return, perhaps . . . this lovely hour would have missed some of its delicate keenness. Consuming fires leave ashes, though they may be white as snow. . . .

Owen's voice roused her, saying:

"Mary, dear,—I've something rather startling to tell you. Be good to me. I shrink from telling you, Mary—but at least you won't misunderstand. You never do that. Only . . ."

"Suppose we drift while you tell me," she said, smiling at him, and to herself she said, "Richard." She could not account for a certain doubtful, troubled look in his eyes, save by that one word. So often she had seen that look in his eyes when he puzzled over the problem of Richard.

He came and sat near her, and the anxiety in his dark, eager face made her long to comfort him.

"Is it Richard?" she asked.

He flushed deeply, but said, "It's myself, Mary." If Mary looked at him, when he told her, as though she thought him about to yield to a mere sensual passion for a pretty morsel of young girlhood, he felt that it would be hard to bear. He knew every expression of those light-grey eyes so well. Would they look coldly amused? . . . Would they look gallantly friendly through a cloud of disappointment in her friend? . . . How, how would those kind, familiar eyes look at him when he had told her?

"Mary," he said, gazing at her anxiously, almost be-

seechingly. "I . . . I am going to be married, and to someone you know. . . ."

He broke off as if waiting for her to help him. It seemed to Mary that life stopped short, while she, the tossed rider, went spinning on into vacancy. Somewhere out of a great void she heard her voice saying:

"To someone I know?"

She felt that her eyes looked blind. Putting up her handkerchief to them, she said again: "Forgive me, Owen, . . . it isn't lack of sympathy . . . it's a gnat . . . in my eye. . . . It stings like fire."

"Poor Mary! Then that blank stare wasn't all for me? . . . Can I help get him out?"

"No, thanks," said Mary, her handkerchief still to her eye. "I think he's drowned by now."

She thought it very strange that she could sit there, talking in such a calm voice, while her breast felt squeezed together by that shrewd pain. A woman of times past, married by proxy to the lover she must forego, and glad to be near him even with the naked sword between, might have felt as Mary did, had he risen and plunged that sword into her heart.

"Some one I know?" she repeated. "You must tell me. I can't think of anyone."

He blushed hotly again, looking away from her. "It's your own little kinswoman . . . Phoebe," he said in a low voice.

"*Phoebe*. . . . Phoebe Nelson? That . . ."

Mary had been going to say "that child," but she broke off, a new pain mixing with the old.

Owen looked at her this time with saddened eyes. "I know what you were going to say, Mary. . . . But think a little before you judge me. We've known each other a long time. Do you think it likely that I? . . ." He, too, broke off, and his look left hers again.

Mary's heart gave a sudden throb.

"There's something under this," she thought. "Something that he's not going to tell me. What is it? What can it be? Does Sally know? . . . Poor Sally! . . . what a tempest must be raging in her."

And Owen was thinking:

"Yes . . . in spite of all, it's natural she should see it in this light. A man of forty-seven marrying a girl of twenty. . . . It looks but one way . . . even to the most

indulgent friend. And then, too, Mary has heard me speak so often against such marriages. . . . But it hurts more than I had dreaded it would."

"How queer life is . . ." Mary was saying thoughtfully. "Do you remember the day we took tea at Sherry's, and I talked to you of Phoebe? . . ."

She stopped. The mocking irony of fate had never so come home to her. She had sent him to Nelson's Gift herself. . . . It was she who had brought them together.

"Yes, I remember," said Owen slowly; "I saw Phoebe for the first time when I rode over with your pareel." He turned full to her.

"Mary . . ."

"Yes, Owen?"

"Phoebe has been very ill. I'm going to take her away as soon as possible."

A new pang for Mary. The marriage was to take place quickly then.

"I love her dearly, Mary."

"I know that. Did you fancy I could think you would marry anyone that you didn't love?"

"No. . . . But . . . we've talked of such things so often. It's such a *volte-face*. . . ."

"Theories are just flimsy rags in life's hands, dear Owen."

Her eyes shone very kindly on him now, and he felt a drawing in his throat that had he been a woman would have meant tears.

"I think," he said, looking down at the fringed end of a ribbon that had blown across his wrist in the light breeze, "I think that she'll be happy with me in spite of . . . of the differenee. . . ."

"And *you*, Owen . . . what about *your* happiness?" said Mary, speaking sharply for the first time.

He started, glancing quickly at her. Then he knew that he must pull himself together, if he did not wish her astute instinct to get on too close a trail. His smile eame very naturally.

"When you see her—even now after her illness—I don't think you'll worry about my happiness, Mary dear."

"Is she so lovely?"

"Winning and lovable in every way. But you'll see for yourself. I've promised to take you there tomorrow."

Mary winced. A little human sting of unreasoning anger shot through her pain.

"If you don't mind, I'd rather have one quiet day at World's-End first," she said.

His dashed expression hurt her so that she cried repentantly the next instant:

"I'm a selfish pig! Of course I'll go. . . . I really want to see little Phoebe, and especially now."

His face brightened like a boy's.

"You couldn't be selfish if you tried," he said, and reaching over gave her hand a warm squeeze. "She hasn't any mother, as you know, and she's a little in awe of Sally. A girl needs some woman to be good to her at such a time."

Again Mary winced. Really, she was not quite old enough to be Phoebe's mother.

The punt had drifted to the bank under a great willow, and the long, tremulous tresses of foliage swayed sadly against the clear mauve sky with its hem of gold brushing the dark hills. All the salmon-rose had faded out. The sunset was like a pale autumn flower.

"Does Sally take it very hard?"

"Rather."

His face grew cold.

"You'll have to be lenient to her, dear Owen. From many points of view it's a great blow to her."

"You're thinking of . . . Richard?"

She noticed the slight hesitation before Richard's name, and the hardness in his voice, which was even colder than his expression.

"I'm thinking of Sally's feeling about Richard. This will change everything for him, you know."

"Yes . . ." he said.

Mary found the grimness of his tone strange. More than ever she felt sure that Richard was in some way involved.

"Where is Richard, now that I think of it?" she asked.

"He and Stokes have gone to the East."

"*Herbert Stokes!* . . . Richard went with Herbert Stokes?"

"Yes. . . . It's rather droll, isn't it?"

"It's more than 'droll,'" said Mary, smiling. "It's mysterious."

Owen got up and poled the punt out into mid-stream again.

"Sally will get jealous if I keep you too long," he said.

As they came near the garden again they saw Sally's white figure on the bank. She waved to them, and Owen turned the punt and poled towards her.

As she stood watching them she noted the grace of Mary's light figure against the red cushions, and suddenly she thought: "*There* was the wife for him! . . . If he had to marry at his age, why didn't he choose Mary?" . . . And she reflected with a sick regret how Mary would probably have had no children. And of how, in that case, Richard would have still been the heir.

"What a fool Owen has been in every way," ran her bitter thought. "Now his first-born will be another man's. And as for any others that may come . . ." A disfiguring smile twitched her lips. It was still on them when the punt came near, but dusk had fallen and it was not visible. She got in beside Mary, wondering if Owen had yet told her of his coming marriage, but she did not dare open the subject before him. They glided to and fro an hour longer, and she and Mary talked of surface things, while Owen, steadily poling, kept silence for the most part.

That night, when Mary found herself alone in her room, she blew out the candle, and, going over to the window, knelt down beside it, quietly leaning her face on her clasped hands and gazing up at the tranquil stars. And as she knelt there she thought of Emerson's fancy in which he imagined Nature looking down on perturbed mortals and saying: "So hot my little sirs?" Then she drew from the bosom of her dress a silver cross, which was fastened to the slender Venetian chain she habitually wore, and looked at it with a half smile. It was a little cross of the twelfth century that Owen had brought her once from Poland. How appropriate that Owen should have given her a cross! . . . She bit her lip suddenly, for the smile had almost changed into a sob. . . . Then she kissed the trinket, and, slipping it back into her bosom, bent down her forehead on her two hands and whispered softly, "Dear Lord, keep my love strong. Keep it unselfish. Keep it good. Keep it real."

She got up from her knees and began slowly to undress. Just as she was about to lie down a knock came at her door.

"It's Sally. . . . May I come in?"

Mary bit her lip again,—a trick that she only had when alone,—then went and opened the door for Sally.

"Oh! . . . you're all in the dark. I'm afraid you were going to sleep."

"No . . . I had just finished brushing my hair."

"Then may I stay just five minutes?"

"Yes, do stay. Wait till I find the matches."

She found them, and lighted her bedroom candle again. The yellow light revealed Sally in the pale-blue dressing gown that so accentuated her thinness and swarthiness. She stood looking at Mary with a sort of angry hunger in her black eyes.

"I'm afraid I'm selfish," she said, "but I do so long for a good talk with you.

"I'm not sleepy . . . truly. Shall we keep the candle lighted or blow it out?"

"Blow it out, do," said Sally. "I like to talk in the starlight."

They settled themselves near the window, and then Mary put its little silver hat on the candle, and the room was filled with quiet dusk again.

"I suppose he's told you," came Sally's voice out of the darkness like a bitter gust.

"Yes," said Mary.

"Did you ever think that Owen could be such a pitiable fool?"

"Calling Owen names won't make things different, Sally."

Sally grew excited.

"Oh, Mary! For God's sake don't be a prig! . . . A man of nearly fifty who marries a girl of twenty *is* a fool, . . . if he were Solomon himself he'd be a fool."

Mary said calmly:

"He's not a fool if he loves her."

"Loves her! Mary! . . . Do you call it love . . . the feeling of a man his age for a bit of dimpled flesh?"

"Don't, Sally," said Mary coldly.

But Sally went furiously on:

"There's no use being superior, Mary. You know as well as I do that no Dante and Beatrice love ever drew a middle-aged man to a pretty chit. It's horrible of Owen to give way to sheer animal desire like this!"

Mary was so sorry for the poor tigress gnashing im-

potently the fangs that could not avail for her whelp that she put aside her indignation and answered very gently.

"Listen, Sally. I don't mean to be a prig, but I do think you harm yourself when you give way to such feelings about Owen, and put them into such rough, bitter words. How can you nurse such feelings against such a brother? And I don't believe in your heart you think it true. You can't think a man like Owen is marrying for such reasons. . . . I believe there's something under it all. Do you know what it is?"

Silence fell between them in the darkness like a soft, ominous body. Then Sally said in a constrained voice: "What could there be under it but what you won't admit? You've always been fanciful about Owen." She paused again, then added with the malice that so seethed in her since yesterday against everyone, against everything,—"A stranger might think you were in love with him yourself, from the way you always resent the mere idea of his having a fault. He's a fine man, of course, but he's been far from a Galahad, I can tell you."

"Oh, Sally," said Mary, and Sally heard her get to her feet in the darkness, "sometimes I think that the moment will come when I have to choose between my self-respect and my friendship for you."

This scared Sally badly. Mary was the one woman in the world whom she really loved and depended on.

She caught at the glimmer of her white gown through the dusk.

"No, no! . . . Don't say that! . . . Why should you be angry? I'm sure I only wish to God that you and he did love each other! . . . Oh, Mary, don't turn on me in my wretchedness. Think, think what it all means to me, and forgive me! . . . My son ruined . . . my home gone. . . . Oh, Mary!"

And she began to sob dryly.

Mary sat down again. She was always easily mollified by any evidence of real affection, and the sincerity in Sally's appeal was beyond doubt. Besides, that cry about wishing that she and Owen had loved each other went very straight to her sore heart. She put her hand on the bent head.

"Poor Sally!" she said. "You do eat your heart so. Let's talk about Richard. Why did he go away and leave you like this?"

Sally choked her sobs at once, and went off into a long, wandering narrative about Richard and the Chinese opera. That was why he had gone to China, she said. He felt that it was absolutely necessary for his work. And she talked on for some moments in this strain, a strong instinct urging her to dispel from Mary's mind all possible ideas of there being anything strange about Richard's sudden departure for the East.

"But," said Mary, "has he given up his painting entirely for the present? . . . Didn't he paint at all while he was here?"

Sally, in her hurried mind, pulled out rapidly one thought after another, like a novice trying which stop of an organ will produce the right tone. If she said "no—not much," Mary would be sure to hear about his portrait of Phoebe. If she spoke of that Mary would ask about it. If she said nothing that would seem queer later on. If she began to speak of Phoebe she was afraid of offending Mary again, and then, too, it would come out how often Richard had been at Nelson's Gift. Yet Mary would be sure to know that some time. Not a stop but would produce the wrong tone! . . . She fumbled with them so long in silence that Mary said,

"Didn't you hear me, dear?"

And then Sally in desperation pulled out the "vox humana" to its full power.

"Oh, Mary! . . . I'm a wretched creature! . . . Richard's art is more to him than I am. . . . And now Owen is going to be taken from me!"

This touched Mary deeply. There was so much of sad truth in that anguished wail. Marriage assuredly divides, to a certain extent, the fondest brother and sister, while she knew well that next to himself his art was first with Richard.

"Mothers of geniuses can't expect everything, my poor dear," she said tenderly, though she didn't at all think Richard a genius. There was really nothing of the prig in Mary. "But little Phoebe must be a sweet child from all I hear. And Owen says you've been very kind to her. Why shouldn't her affection prove a new comfort to you? You can't think that Owen would ever want you to leave World's-End."

Sally sat up straight and stiff as a steel rod under Mary's soothing hand.

"I can't talk of Phoebe Nelson to you, Mary. She's your first cousin. I consider that she's treated me with cruel ingratitude."

"With ingratitude? . . . *You?* But how's that possible?"

"If she has any intelligence whatever,—and she has plenty, believe me,—she must have known how she was wrecking my whole life and my son's, too, by accepting Owen."

Mary could not help smiling to herself in the darkness. This speech struck her as so peculiarly "Sallyesque." "My dear Sally," she protested, "how could you expect a young girl smitten with first love to think of its consequences to anyone?"

"First love!" came the bitter voice out of the darkness, and, before she could restrain it, a laugh broke from Sally.

Something in this laugh shocked Mary.

"Do you mean," she said, very gravely, "to insinuate that Phoebe? . . . "

Sally's words of denial came stumbling. She was badly frightened again.

"I don't mean anything but that the idea of 'first love' has always struck me as ridiculous. Why,—a girl like that must have been in love with someone ever since she could lisp! . . . It's so. . . . "

"Why do you say 'a girl like that'?" said Mary sharply.

"Oh, Mary! Don't catch me up so. . . . I only meant any girl just out of her teens. You talk exactly as if you thought I meant to say something disparaging."

"It certainly sounded like it," said Mary, who had a temper of her own, which somehow Sally always ended by rousing.

Sally got up and said in a forlorn voice:

"I think I'd better go to bed. . . . I'm dead tired . . . and I only keep offending you."

Mary rose too.

"I really think that sleep will help you more than I can," she said, "I'm truly, truly sorry for you, but I do think you're borrowing trouble."

"One doesn't borrow what one has too much of already," said Sally dryly, "but one's own troubles always seem superfluous to others."

Mary put her hand on the thin shoulder. Its thinness seemed suddenly pathetic to her. It was as if Sally

inhabited a frame out of which all softness had been burnt by her fierce passions.

"Are you going to quarrel with me as well as with poor Owen?" she said, smiling. "Don't Sally. . . . Lonely anger is the king demon."

"No," said Sally harshly, "helpless anger is. But I don't want to quarrel with you, Mary. I'm very trying I know, but unhappy people are always trials."

"Don't talk like that, dear," said Mary, melting again. She leaned forward and kissed her. "Go and try to get some sleep. Tomorrow may be different."

"It can only be worse. But I mustn't say anything more. Good-night, Mary."

"Good-night, Sally."

Sally took up the candle which she had left lighted outside the door, and went swiftly away down the long corridor.

Mary stood looking after her, then with a sigh she turned and entered her room again.

From her window she could see the windows of Owen's study in the East Wing. There was a lamp burning on his desk, and as she looked he came and sat down by it, spreading out some papers before him.

Mary's heart stirred painfully. He was making preparations for his marriage. She closed the shutters of her window and turned away.

XXIV

SHALL you ride over to Nelson's Gift or shall I drive you?" asked Owen of Mary at breakfast the next morning.

"I think I'll get you to drive me, please," said Mary, smiling. "It's a very womanly occasion, and I don't feel as though I could be as motherly as you seem to wish in riding-boots."

"I should think that now, at least, you'd wish you had a motor here," put in Sally. "A lover in the twentieth century, with only horses at his command and five or six miles to travel several times every day, does seem at a disadvantage."

She was making a great effort to be natural and pleasant,

but she could not wash all tartness from her words and manner, try as she might.

"Oh, I should hate the thought of a motor at World's-End," said Mary impulsively.

"I feel about motors, here, much as the king who had all the machinery in his kingdom smashed, for fear they'd grow in power and intelligence until they came to rule over men," said Owen. "Don't you remember the engaging picture in Erewhon, of the engine in her shed with all the little engines gamboling around her like foals?"

To his infinite delight, although he still felt very sore against her, Sally replied with some stiffness: "I've never been to Erewhon, or whatever the place is."

Mary, who cherished Samuel Butler as much as he did, dared not glance at him. The dimple near her chin came and went.

"You won't come with us, Sally?" she asked

"Not today. My head is tiresome."

Mary and Owen drove off half an hour later behind a pair of fast brown cobs. The blue sky, softened by a skein of silvery cloud, seemed like a tent made for happiness. She sat there beside him, her eyes following the eight busy hoofs, and thought:

"This is one of our last drives together. It will never be like this again. Life is freakish and very cruel. I am not happy, but if he could be happy I should not mind. For a little while he will think he is. But afterwards. . . ."

And she saw Owen sadly enough, a white-haired man of seventy when his wife would be still a young woman, only a year or two older than she herself was now.

She looked up at him, throwing back her shoulders under her white cambric gown.

"Tell me something about Phoebe," she said. "You've scarcely spoken of her at all."

Owen let the whip just touch "Jinko's" quarters, and the fiery little horse plunged ahead with a snort.

"I haven't talked about her on purpose," he said. "When there are two people that you're especially anxious to have 'friends,' it's the greatest mistake to talk much about them to each other."

"Well . . . perhaps you're right," said Mary.

Her eyes were on his brown hand,—he had not put on his gloves which she had picked up from the seat when

she got in, and now held in her lap. The little flat aluminum sleeve-links, with the sapphire sparks, she had known ever since she knew him. She could close her eyes at any time and see those strong wrists and the sheen of the stiff white linen against them, held by those links, as plainly as she saw them now. As is often the way with women, Owen's hands seemed more vividly dear to her than even his face, with the quick-moving affectionate hazel eyes that she so loved. He wore no ring of any kind. Now she wondered if he would wear a wedding-ring. Somehow this thought hurt her more than even the thought of so soon seeing the woman who was going to be his wife.

"How silent you are today, Mary dear!" said Owen, looking down at her with a smile. "Are you pondering all the possible sorrows that may lurk for me in the estate of marriage?"

This was so near the truth that Mary gave a little guilty laugh.

"I can't help it, Owen. Marriage is such a venture."

"Everything worth having or doing is a venture, isn't it?"

"I suppose so," said Mary.

Owen laughed in his turn.

"I must say you're rather dampening, my dear girl."

"Oh, am I? Oh, I should hate to be that!" cried Mary, and the colour flew into her face. "Oh, don't say that! Please. . . . "

"Why, Mary dear, of course I know it's just your affection for me."

Just her "affection" for him! . . .

Mary's short upper lip trembled a little.

"You see," she said, in a matter of fact voice, the next moment, "I know you so much better than most people do. I know what a tragedy marriage would mean to you if it turned out anything less than perfect."

She saw his face change, though she was looking past him at the horses' ears.

"I'm afraid marriage is never 'perfect,' Mary."

"Yours ought to be," she said, in a low voice.

He turned and put his hand over hers with one of those frank, impulsive caresses that always pleased and hurt her, which most, she could not tell.

"Mary dear," he said, "do you know I've sometimes thought if you'd ever cared for me . . . in that way, we two might have been very happy."

Mary felt as though he had struck her. If she had ever cared . . . in that way! Had she, then, hidden all feeling too successfully? Was the devastation of her life all her own doing? But the next instant a sure intuition came to her aid. No—there was no use blinding herself. Not once in all their long affectionate friendship had he felt one throb of stronger emotion for her.

"You mustn't jest to an old maid about such a wonderful lost opportunity," she said lightly. "It isn't worthy of true knighthood."

"Well, after all," said Owen thoughtfully, "a friendship like ours is one of the best things in life."

"Indeed it is," she said heartily.

As the trap emerged from Hollybrook Wood, Phoebe, watching from her window for the first cloud of dust, with all the nervous eagerness of a "Sister Ann," saw it at once, and her heart began to beat violently. She had spent the whole morning over her toilet. She must look her very best to greet "Cousin Mary," the dearest friend of the being that she worshipped with all the passion of a guilty gratitude. For Phoebe did not blind herself. She told herself over and over with burning pain that she was a wicked, wicked girl, in spite of that cherished feeling that Owen would forgive her if he knew. It was very clear to her that she should tell him, and yet, given her youth and inexperience and the anguish of fear from which she had just barely escaped, . . . she had no more power to struggle out of this desperate temptation than a poor linnet out of the grip of the bird-lime. Then, too, her native joy in life and a certain childishness which was part of her being made her now, and were to make her again and again, lose her heavy sense of her true situation with its problem and its guilt in the glamour of these days so suddenly and bewilderingly radiant.

She had ransacked her mother's little trunk in the attic for something especially pretty to wear, and had decided at last on an old fichu of embroidered Indian muslin trimmed with *point appliqué*. This soft web-like kerchief she had adjusted over a straight little frock of corn-coloured muslin with short, ruffled sleeves. About her throat she tied a band of black velvet, and drew another through

her hair. When all was done she looked like a winning portrait by Romney, and the little peak of hair on her forehead, over black-blue eyes, made her likeness to his "divine lady" very striking.

Anxiety, dread, a sort of shamed exultation which she could not suppress, had set a lovely carmine under her eyes, still so over-bright and startled in their quick glances.

When Mary saw her she said to herself: "No wonder! She is one of the most bewitching creatures I ever looked at!"

"Think of this being my little butter-ball Phoebe!" she said, and took her straightway in her arms.

Great tears sprang to Phoebe's eyes. She tried hard to speak but could not. Owen stood looking on, with an odd human pride in the loveliness that he saw had gone to Mary's heart. And all at once he thought: "Yes . . . I shall suffer. If she can't ever love me . . . I shall suffer badly." He turned away, saying that he would go and talk to Mr. Nelson while they "made friends" anew, after all these years.

"Suppose you take me up to your own room?" suggested Mary as he left them, her arm still about Phoebe's waist; the child was a full inch taller than she was. How strange! Somehow she had always gone on thinking of her as a little girl all this time. "We should be so much more comfy and to ourselves there. You know I adored your mother, Phoebe dear. You seem to belong to me specially. And just now, at this wonderful time in your life. . . . "

Phoebe's head went down on her shoulder.

"Oh, Cousin Mary," she said very low, "don't be too sweet to me. . . . And . . . and don't talk of mother . . . I can't bear it . . . now. . . . "

Mary leaned her cheek down against the girl's and held her close without saying anything. There was that same strange mingling of joy and anguish in thus holding close to her heart the one thing in the world dearest now to Owen. Mary would have spoiled the plot of a melodrama entirely. She was the woman scorned, she told herself with her irrepressible quick sense of the incongruous, and, instead of acting like the classic fury, here she was, cherishing her rival as though she had really been the mother whose part Owen wished her to play.

"Shall we go to your room, dear?" she said again, at

last. "I want to see Jimmy Toots. Owen has told me how he watched over your bed all the time you were ill."

So Phoebe shyly led the way upstairs and Mary made the acquaintance of Jimmy Toots and King Reddy. The cardinal bird flew to Phoebe when she whistled and lighting on her head tickled her with his sharp little claws. It seemed to Mary that the girl looked appropriately crowned with flame, as the brilliant scarlet wings fluttered over her hair.

"No wonder . . . no wonder . . . " she kept repeating to herself. And gazing earnestly at Phoebe she tried to see through that mask of a young face, so much harder to penetrate than the faces of the middle-aged and old, on which life has left writing more or less decipherable. Had she depth . . . character . . . or only this keen, heady charm of colouring and vitality, and the native sweetness of temper which was revealed by every line and expression? . . .

They talked all sorts of intimate, everyday things, sitting there together in Phoebe's little room with its old white furniture wreathed in roses of blue. And Mary said how many times she had longed to have Phoebe with her, only her (Mary's) Aunt Lucy had been such an invalid that she couldn't have anyone. And then, too, Phoebe had been with her grandmother in Roanoke for so many years. "For how long was it, really, dear?"

"Ever since I was fourteen until last year," said Phoebe. "But you used to write me such beautiful letters, Cousin Mary. I used to put them under my pillow. I loved them even better than your stories—and I always loved your stories best of all. Look. . . . " She pointed shyly to the little shelves on either side of the fireplace. "I have them all there."

And Mary saw that there indeed were her five little blue-and-gold fairy-tales for children. "You sweet child!" she said, kissing Phoebe's hair. "I feel I've missed something very lovely in not having shared those years with you."

"But I love you just the same, dear Cousin Mary," said Phoebe, nestling up to her with a glowing look of grateful response to this tenderness.

"What an almost terribly ardent nature the child has!" thought Mary. And for the first time she thought of Owen's responsibility towards Phoebe in their coming mar-

riage, instead of Phoebe's towards him. "Tell me, Phoebe," she said suddenly. "What did you think of Richard? . . . Did you see much of him?" Phoebe changed colour so violently and her eyes dilated so that Mary thought. . . . "She dislikes him and is afraid of him." "I don't believe you like Master Richard any more than I do, Phoebe," she said, smiling.

The girl hesitated a moment, and then said in a low voice:

"Why don't you like him, Cousin Mary?"

Mary looked consideringly at her for a moment, and then she said:

"I believe I'll just speak out to you, dear, because you will probably be brought into close relations with him, and it's just as well that he shouldn't bemuse you as he does most women. He's a clever trickster, is Master Richard, and that's the truth, my dear. He's very clever indeed, but he's a trickster, and never so happy as when he's leading some unsuspecting woman by her pretty nose to worship at his altar. And he's the most finished egoist I ever knew, and I'm afraid that he's very false. Perhaps I oughtn't to prejudice you like this, but I can't bear to think of Richard's winning you for a possible disciple. You see, he turns up his very handsome and silly nose at Owen. . . . "

"How dare he!" cried Phoebe, starting up. Her eyes looked as black as Sally's in her white face. Mary drew her down again, much amused. "Why, what a little fire-eater!" she said. "Wait till you know the gifted Richard better. He probably looks down in his thought on the Christ as a sort of gifted young fanatic with bourgeois ideas of fellow love. Just how cruel one can be with perfect *sang froid*, in the pursuit of one's own desires, is his measure for strength of character, I fancy. But, as I said, he's very clever, and very, very good-looking in a sort of early-eighteenth-century-Don-Juanish way. Mercy! what a composite adjective! . . . So you are just as well warned beforehand, my dear,—though you think your Cousin Mary rather catty for doing it."

"How dare he look down on . . . on . . . Cousin Owen!" burst forth Phoebe again.

"If you ask *me*," said Mary, laughing outright this time, "*I* think it's because he's really a donkey in spite of his cleverness. He'd be sure to make a mess of any serious

issue in his life, and his opinions of people aren't worth —*that!*"

And she snapped her slender forefinger and thumb as deftly as a school-boy.

"He isn't worthy," said Phoebe, her breast heaving, "he isn't worthy to scrub the ground where Cousin Owen has trodden!"

"Phoebe," said Mary, the little dance beginning in her eyes, "are you going to continue calling Owen 'Cousin Owen' after you are Mrs. Randolph?"

"Oh, *Cousin Mary!*" cried Phoebe, one flame, and she slid down by the chair on which Mary was seated and hid her face in her lap.

Such vehement feeling startled while it amused Mary. She could not help wondering, as she stroked the bright head against her knees, if Owen would not find such excessive and ardent sensitiveness a little disconcerting at times. "Do you love him so much, little Phoebe?" she said, very gently.

Phoebe lifted a face so transfigured that it reminded Mary of the face of Stephen when the gaping crowd had seen it change and become "as the face of an angel." Almost holy was the expression of Phoebe's white, glowing face. "It's more than love. . . . I worship him the way I ought to worship God!" she cried.

"Oh, my little child! Take care . . . take care!" said Mary, a clutch at her heart of pitiful tenderness. "The woman who loves a man like that throws herself bound into the furnace."

"I'd be thrown bound into hell for him!" said Phoebe in a low, concentrated voice. And in the blindness of her inconsistent simplicity, not even for a fleeting second did it cross her mind that it was she herself who might be dragging Owen into the very depths she spoke of. A great Russian has truly said that "as a general rule, people, even the wicked, are much more naïf and simple-hearted than we suppose."

Mary shuddered and drew her sharply up beside her.

"Don't, dear," she said. "It hurts me to hear you talk like that."

"You don't know . . . you don't know . . . " said Phoebe, hiding her face in her hands, and beginning to shiver also. "I . . . I can't explain . . . but that's the way I feel, and nothing can ever, ever change it!"

When they went downstairs again they found Owen and Mr. Nelson seriously poring over some papers which lay between them on one of the little tables. The old gentleman welcomed Mary warmly. He had always been "considerably attached" to her, as he would have put it, and now he felt that her presence during this agitating time was a great boon.

"I suppose my little girl has been telling you of the very gratifying and happy change that is to take place in her life, so soon now," he said, retaining Mary's hand a moment and looking up at her rather wistfully. "I deplore my own loss but not her gain," he added. "And if you could make me a little visit when she has gone next week I should count it a generous action on your part, my dear Mary."

"Of course I'll come, Uncle Thomas," said Mary cordially. Her heart contracted, but nothing of this inner hurt showed on her kind face. "Is it to be so soon?" she asked.

"Owen—our kinsman has requested me to call him by his Christian name—Owen wishes the wedding to take place this coming Monday, as the French steamer sails on Wednesday, and he is very anxious to take Phoebe away from the scene of her late illness. My child," he continued, addressing Phoebe, "you will share your life with one of the most generous of men. These marriage settlements that. . . ."

"Please——" said Owen with a hot blush, putting his hand over the papers.

"Well, well," said the old gentleman indulgently, "I will respect your modesty. It is a rare enough asset nowadays if all that is told me be true."

"By the way, Phoebe," said Owen, hastening to change the subject beyond all possibility of relapse, "this will be a famous chance to choose your cabin, with Mary here to help you. I've got the plan of the *Lorraine* with me. . . ."

He came over and drew up a chair and one of Mr. Nelson's brood of little tables to where Mary and Phoebe were seated.

"See," he said, spreading the plan of the ship out before them, "there are the different decks. Now you can take Mary's advice, because she's crossed so often, and will know know better what you would probably like than

I would. If we take a *cabine de luxe* it will give us away at once, and I detest deck cabins myself—there's always such a beastly row going on just outside—but most women prefer them, I believe."

He was so absorbed in getting the bearings on the rather intricate plan before them that he did not notice how rose-red Phoebe's face flared, nor the almost piteous look of shy alarm that came into her eyes.

Mary took one of the cold little hands and held it tightly. Men were dear, clumsy, tactless beings, she reflected. Probably Saint Peter's father never left off telling him that he would have to set off for his fishing at cock-crow, while his mother, she felt sure, never so much as used a feather-bed again! She smiled her little, dry half-smile, thankful that she held the priceless antidote of humour against pain. She explained the different decks to Phoebe with kindly interest.

"I agree with Owen," she said. "Unless you want to be labeled 'bride and groom' from the start you can't have a *cabin e de luxe*. I'd rather have cabins on the saloon deck every time, especially at this season of the year. You can have the ports open all the way."

"These two I've marked are rather nice, I think," said Owen, pointing with the little aluminum pencil that Phoebe was beginning to associate with him as Mary did the sleeve-links.

"Very nice," said Mary approvingly. "Not too near the dining-room, and not too far from the bath-rooms. Do we practical old travellers shock your romance, my dear?" she ended, turning with a smile to Phoebe.

"Oh, no . . . no indeed. I think it's lovely of you to take such interest . . . " protested the girl, stammering and blushing more than ever.

"Well, then," said Owen, also smiling at her confused little face, "shall we say these two?"

"Yes . . . please," murmured Phoebe.

"Then *that's* settled," said he with an air of relief, and folding up the plan returned it to his pocket.

"What about your wedding-dress, Phoebe?" asked Mary suddenly.

"I . . . I'm not going to have one, Cousin Mary," said the girl, white now instead of rosy.

"No wedding-dress and veil!" cried Mary. "But if I'm

to act *maman* to you, I really can't allow such a breach of tradition!"

"No . . . please Cousin Mary . . . please," pleaded the girl, catching her by the arm, such a passion almost as of terror in her dilating eyes that Mary was startled.

Owen came to the poor child's rescue.

"I've asked her not to, Mary," he said. "I hate all that sort of bridal pomp. . . . Why couldn't she be married in the gown she has on. It's quite lovely I think."

"Oh, no!" cried Mary. "'Yellow's foresworn'—don't you remember?"

She quoted the old rhyme:

"Green is forsaken,
Yellow's foresworn;
Blue's the sweetest colour that's worn."

"Why not the Virgin's colours,—blue and white? She would look a perfect sweet in blue and white?"

Phoebe changed colour so rapidly that Mary could only account for this over-emotionalism by the fact that she had not entirely recovered from her illness.

"Listen, Phoebe dear," she said, drawing the girl to her. "Let's send Owen back to talk to Uncle Thomas and I'll tell you a nice plan I've thought of."

She gave Owen a look over Phoebe's head that sent him back to Mr. Nelson's chair at the other end of the room. Then she said: "Darling, I've a really sweet white chiffon gown that I've never worn but once. I'm a famous seamstress, and I can fit it to you in a morning. You shall just wear that and some of the lovely white roses I saw in your garden as we came up."

"Oh, thank you, dear, dear Cousin Mary!—How good you are to me!" said the girl, a mist of gratitude in her eyes. "Everyone is good to me—oh, much, much too good to me. I don't deserve any of it—not any of it."

And to Mary's dismay she caught her under lip in her teeth and began to struggle with sobs that would rise in spite of her. She looked so pale now that Mary came to the swift conclusion that the excitement of their visit and the allusions to her wedding had been too much for her strength after her recent grave illness.

"There . . . there . . ." she soothed, patting the quivering shoulders as she would have done a child's. "Go up to your little blue-rose room and lie down dear. I shall

take Owen away now. We've stayed too long as it is. I see well why he wants to get you away in such a hurry. This illness has played all sorts of pranks with your nerves. Go and rest now, and I'll bring over the white chiffon tomorrow."

As they drove home she told Owen that Phoebe seemed to her terribly over-wrought and keyed up.

"Don't you think you'd better have a doctor see her?" she ended. "This week will be very trying for her. And I really can't think how the child is to go quietly through such a strain as the wedding ceremony without something to calm her a little."

"Phoebe has her mother's dread of doctors," said Owen, giving his attention to "Jinko," who was playing rocking-horse at a bit of white paper in the road.

"But she would listen to you, Owen."

"Sally and her father both think it's better not to force her when she's so excitable."

"Well . . . " said Mary doubtfully, "you three have been with her through it all, so I suppose you know best, but I should certainly have Charles Patton in to give her some simple nerve-sedative."

XXV

THOSE were days of exquisite mental torture for Sally. Obliged by force of circumstance to control herself outwardly when in the presence of others, her bedroom became the scene of frantic outbursts, during which she would prowl to and fro as in a cage, talking aloud to herself, gesticulating fiercely, sometimes dashing objects to the floor, as she had hurled her brush against the wall on the night that Owen had told her of his coming marriage. "I'm going mad. . . . I'm going mad," she would say, her hands in her grey hair. And indeed it was a sort of madness that possessed poor Sally then,—the cruellest of dementias, impotent rage,—that starveling passion that thrives on its own leanness, and grows by what it may not feed on. She "went all the day angry" and the night did not allay her pangs, for she had dark, turgid dreams wherein, when she would have struck, her arm encountered soft waves of resistance, as though one should try to smite a foe through heavy waters and—when she would have

spoken fierce truths,—her tongue seemed pasted to her palate.

Then, too, reaction would come upon her without warning—a slacking of the savage impulses almost harder to bear than her spasms of thwarted anger. And crouching forward in her chair, her chin gripped in her thin, jewelled fingers, she would brood by the hour on the infamy of her silence, at this crucial moment in his life, towards the brother who had been more than a brother to her in all her troubles. Yet not for a heart-beat did she think of breaking it.

There is no selfishness so ruthless as the selfishness of the female defending its young; the human jungle knows no more pitiless man-eater than the over-maternalised woman with an only son to nourish and protect. Had Owen been about to marry unwittingly some street-woman, and had this marriage been to Richard's profit, Sally would still have held her tongue. She loved Richard with that strange animal passion of maternity which has no sense of humour and therefore no sense of proportion. "And they twain shall be one flesh" applied in her mind to mother and child far more than to husband and wife.

When Richard had been laid in her arms after her dark agony, she had not once thought of her husband as his father. Poor Peter, lifting his round, sanguine face all blotched with tears of pity from the rumpled bed-clothes where he had been hiding it until this supreme moment, had seemed as detached from her mysterious, isolated rapture as great Cæsar dead and turned to clay. "Mine . . . mine . . . mine . . . mine . . . mine," her exultant rhapsodist heart had beat the measure. The child was hers as the world is its Creator's . . . as Adam was his Maker's when he formed him alone out of the dust.

Despite these devastating outbreaks in the privacy of her own room, however, Sally played the part she had elected gallantly enough in public. Mary found the worn, burnt-out look in her face quite natural, considering all things, and she was very tender with her somewhat trying friend during all that time. It is certain that one gets used to suffering, just as the muscles grow accustomed to hard labour, and, though Mary also had some grim struggles with pain in those days, yet she bore it well, and no trace of it ever crept into her face when others were looking.

She went over alone, next morning, with the white chiffon gown, thinking with sad whimsicality how odd it was that Owen's bride should be going to wear one of her dresses at the altar. "Life's little ironies," Thomas Hardy called such incidents.

Phoebe was much calmer today and, though the lack of excitement left her face colourless and a little wan, Mary thought her even lovelier than before. The girl's almost pathetic appreciation of her gift won all her tender heart.

Only one jar she had during that visit, and this was when her uncle alluded to Richard's portrait of Phoebe and insisted on Phoebe's getting it out for Mary to see.

The girl changed colour in the painful way of yesterday and said—in the low tone that Mary had already learned meant inner distress—"I can't, father. Cousin Owen had it packed Wednesday to send to New York."

"You will see it there, then, my dear Mary," the old gentleman said cheerfully. "I imagine that you will not find it a very good likeness."

When Mary and Phoebe were in the latter's bedroom, trying on the chiffon gown, Mary said as she pinned the folds into place:

"Phoebe, dear, why didn't you tell me yesterday that Richard had painted your portrait?"

There was a certain reproach in her kind voice.

Phoebe answered again in that low tone.

"I hate that picture, Cousin Mary. I hate talking about it."

"But you let me say all those things, dear, without giving me a hint that you had seen him so often."

"I despise him . . . I can't bear to talk about him."

Try as she would to prevent it, a little rigour ran over her.

"Was he . . . rude to you?" asked Mary gravely.

There was a slight pause.

"He . . . he . . . made fun of me," said Phoebe at last, almost inaudibly.

There was such bitterness in the young, stifled voice that Mary thought she had the clue. "I see," she told herself. "He ridiculed all her girlish ideals and made his usual offensive remarks about decency and religion and all the virtues . . . quite enough to make a romantic young girl 'despise him,' as we Virginians say." She

"'WAS HE . . . RUDE TO YOU?' ASKED MARY GRAVELY"—*Page 174*

decided not to press the matter further, and merely said:

"I'm glad you don't like him, dear. I was afraid that you might have been impressed by his gorgeous paradoxes. He looks at life through very ugly spectacles, does Richard."

Phoebe said nothing, and when Mary had finished pinning the gown into place they sat near the window and sewed on it together.

Mary thought the picture of the young girl sewing on her wedding-dress, with the great crow perched in his usual place on her shoulder, singularly striking. "Ominous," she felt the superstitious would have called it. "Phoebe," she said suddenly, returning to the subject that she had meant to dismiss entirely, "how did Richard paint you?"

"In a gold gown," said Phoebe, her voice again sinking.

"With the crow?" asked Mary intuitively.

"Yes."

"He would," said Mary, and she smiled, dropping the subject this time for good.

Sally came over once with Mary before the wedding. She was very polite and interested in her manner, and Phoebe could gather nothing of her inner thought from her composed face and sombre black eyes which never rested for an instant upon hers. She had dreaded beyond words that Sally would seek an interview with her alone, and when Owen made excuses about her not coming to Nelson's Gift again before Monday, as she was quite ill and meant to keep her bed until then,—a great weight seemed to roll from Phoebe's heart.

On Sunday afternoon Owen came with the brown cobs and took her for a long drive.

She wore the corn-coloured frock because he had said that it was "lovely," and a white gauze hat with wreaths of little blue roses that Mary had given her.

"You look like the spirit of the day in that sunshiny gown and sky-coloured hat," said Owen, smiling down at her. "But it seems to me that your expression is just a little too sober for your dress, dear. What is it, sweetheart? Doubts? . . . Have you been counting my grey hairs when I wasn't looking?"

"You haven't hardly a grey hair! Your hair is beauti-

ful!" cried Phoebe hotly, and then blushed as Owen broke into irrepressible laughter.

"I shall have to call you 'honey-pot,'" he said, "I'm not used to such sugared speeches."

"Well . . . it *is* beautiful," said Phoebe, taking refuge in obstinacy—then with a little touch of her old spirit—"People must have told you so before, Cousin Owen—I'm sure they must!"

"Yes, I'm a pretty fellow," said Owen, delighted with this outburst, and glad to tease her a little. "Hearths have been strewed with wreckage by my mere passing."

Phoebe's face went crimson again.

"You're laughing at me," she said chokingly. "Oh, Cousin Owen please, please don't laugh at me!"

In return he bent down, put his hand over hers and, looking into her shy eyes, said, smiling:

"Phoebe, you *must* learn to call me Owen."

"I . . . I'm afraid I never can," she stammered gazing into the goldish-grey eyes so near her, and noticing, despite her confusion, that there were little flecks of brown and green near their pupils. "It sounds so . . . so. . . . "

"Disrespectful?" teased Owen.

"You're unkind!" flashed Phoebe passionately, and sudden tears made his face seem blurred to her. Owen felt remorseful. He had only meant to laugh her into being a little more at ease with him. Poor child! She was just one quiver of sore nerves.

"I wouldn't be unkind to you for anything in the world, little heart," he said gently. "Just feel in my pocket—I need both hands for these monkeys by this bank—and see what you'll find there. That will show you better than words where I place kindness in the scheme of things."

Phobe hesitated an instant, then he felt her slight fingers fluttering like a bird in his pocket. She drew out a little blue-velvet box and her colour changed like the wind.

"Open it, dear," he said, and she pressed the spring. Her wedding ring lay there before her. She sat staring at it, her lips parted.

"Read what's inside, Phoebe," he said again.

She looked in the narrow circlet and read the words: "*Phoebe—Owen. July* 8, 1912. *Kindliness.*"

"You see," he said, watching her face, over which the quick emotions chased each other like shadows over a field of blowing wheat. "I've chosen 'kindliness' as the motto of our life together, dear Phoebe. So you may always be sure,—whatever happens,—that I never mean to be unkind."

Suddenly she stooped and pressed her lips to his hand, so wholly occupied with the fractious "Jinks" and "Jinko."

"You're like God to me!" she said, in response to his embarrassed remonstrance, and hid her face against his sleeve.

At first Mary had thought of spending the night before the marriage with Phoebe at Nelson's Gift, but she decided, after talking it over with Owen, to leave the child quite alone with her father on that eve, and to go over before breakfast in the morning with him. The wedding was to take place very early, in order to allow them to catch the noon train at Crewe.

And Phoebe, as dearly as she loved Mary, was glad to be alone, for being with her father seemed almost like being alone—so far, so mercifully far was he from all real knowledge of the conflicting passions in her heart.

She sat on a low stool close beside him after supper, and leaned her head against his knee.

"I hate to think of your being all alone when I am gone, father dear," she said wistfully. "But then, Cousin Mary is going to stay a week with you, and soon Aunt Charlotte will be coming. I am so glad that she will make her home here now."

"Your great-aunt," said the old gentleman, clearing his throat, "is of an affectionate disposition. I am considerably attached to her—but she is strangely fantastical in some of her ideas. It will not be like having you, my daughter."

"Oh, father dear," cried Phoebe, fondling his old hand against her cheek. "I am coming back to you soon, soon! Cousin . . . I mean Owen says that I shall."

"A wife's place is with her husband, my child," said the old man, his voice quivering a little. "Owen will not find me a jealous parent."

"He loves you too . . . he wants me to be with you. . . .

He showed me with a pencil just where your room would be at World's-End."

"He is one of the best of men," said her father, with feeling. "I part with you in perfect confidence as to your future. I am resigning you into the care of a noble character."

"Yes, yes, father dear," cried ardent Phoebe, and she knelt up and threw her arms about his neck, drawing the old face, with its subtle, mawkish odor of age, close to her fruit-scented cheek. "There is no one as noble as he is in all the world, except you, my own dear father!"

But in her heart of hearts Phoebe did not think even her father, whom she fondly loved, as noble as the man whom she was to marry on the morrow.

"There . . . there, my child. Calm yourself," he replied, smiling faintly at the affectionate falsehood which he divined. "It is not well to compare the differing but equally natural affections which we may feel. Sit here by me, where we can both look upon your dear mother's face, and let us offer a prayer in our hearts that her knowledge and love may be with you in this hour of your happiness."

They sat there silently, hand in hand, and the old heart going gently out on the tide of tender memories could not know the shrinking anguish which wrung the young heart, so miserably begging God to keep from her mother the dark truth—to let her know only so much of her child's fate as would, she felt sure, make even heaven a happier place to her.

And all night long Phoebe dreamed that her mother came flitting softly near, and that her eyes, at first so lovingly happy, would change and grow piteous, as some dark power whispered the truth to her. Only towards morning did she fall into an unquiet sleep and from this she was waked by the blithe voice of Aunt Patty saying:

"Git up, git up l'il bride! Dee bridegroom's a-waitin' fuh you, an' Miss Mary's a-dressin' dee bridal-altrum!"

When the old negress had gone Phoebe slipped from her bed upon her knees and prayed passionately for the first time since disaster had overtaken her. She prayed that whatever she might suffer, whatever punishment might fall upon her, whatever life held for her of darkness and of bitterness, that never, never, through her should sorrow come upon Owen.

"O God," ran the childish wording of her prayer, "Thou knowest that I love him and adore him more than I do thee—but, O kind God, only punish *me* for that . . . keep him safe from my sins!"

The day was again lovely, but promised rain towards evening. The whole green world seemed but the playground for joyous shadows. In Phoebe's garden the roses fluttered in the wind like white birds trying to escape and join in the blithe game of sun and air. Mary ruthlessly snipped off great masses of them to decorate the old octagonal hall where the wedding ceremony was to take place. She had brought with her a heavily embroidered shawl of white Canton crêpe that Owen's grandmother had worn on her wedding journey; there had been no railway smoke to defile such things in those days, and the pure, white folds made a lovely covering for the little table that Mary had set as an altar, with silver candlesticks and heaps of Banksia and Damask roses. Box and ivy she trailed over the old green-paneled walls. The place looked like the Bower of Seven Delights when she had finished. She had sent Owen up to wait in Mr. Nelson's study, now seldom used because of the old man's rheumatic knees. Sally would not arrive for yet another half-hour. Stepping back to the front door, Mary looked approvingly upon her work—then suddenly, there being no one to see, her hands went up to her face and she swayed a little. The knife in her heart had turned sharply. For one second she had realised what it was that she had been about that morning. Only for a moment,—because Mary would have made an excellent citizen of Carthage during the last days of that city.

Then she went up to help Phoebe adjust the white chiffon gown on which were several dozens of little hooks-and-loops to fasten.

The girl began trembling from the time the gown went over her head until the last hook was in place. And even when this was done the trembling continued. Mary whipped out a bottle of aromatic ammonia from her bag. She put a teaspoonful in half a glass of water and approached Phoebe.

"Take this," she said firmly, holding the cloudy mixture to her lips. The girl obeyed docilely and by and by the trembling ceased.

In the meantime Owen, feeling very absurd in a frock-

coat and white tie at half-past nine in the morning, was walking about the little study upstairs gazing alternately at a fine old print of Harrow, to which school Mr. Nelson's father had also gone, and reading over and over the dry titles on the musty, calf-skin backs of the fat volumes presented to him on neat wooden shelves.

"The Nelsons of Fauquier," he read, "The Nelsons of Queen Charlotte County," "The Moores of Farley"—"Owen Randolph's Exploration of the Green-Flower River"—"Account by Phoebe Nelson of her Interview with Powhatan." This promised a moment's diversion at least. He took down the yellow-grey volume and opened it. Little silver-grey creatures fled over the page like minnows. He slapped the book together to dislodge them and read:

"I was mightily astonished when I saw that the hue of the renowned Chieftain was no more of a ruddy colour than my shoe. He was a right mannerly man for a savage and bore himself with a sour pride. I found it difficult to support the glances of his eagle eye with becoming composure. The interpreter disclosed his meaning in language that seemed to me too choice to emanate from an untutored savage, but he assured me that Powhatan possessed a considerable gift of diction. . . . "

Owen put back the little book with a smile. The Phoebe Nelson of that day expressed herself so exactly like her descendant the Thomas Nelson of this. Their "gift of diction," as she would have said, was almost identical.

He pulled out his watch and looked at it . . . a quarter past ten. The Reverend Henry Nelson, a kinsman of course, was to arrive at this hour. Owen and Phoebe were to be married punctually at half-past ten, to allow an hour for the drive to Crewe. And here Owen became aware of such physical nervousness that to jump from the window, even at the risk of breaking his legs, would have been a relief. He went to it and looked out. Ah . . . there was Sally—in a gown of white lace that she had got to wear when she went to Newport with Richard later in the summer. How ghastly she looked—poor Sally! He felt that he must look queer himself. Certainly civilisation liked to invent for itself trying ordeals. If he and Phoebe could only have driven over quietly to the Reverend Henry's some morning and said: "We want to catch the noon train for New York,—please marry us as quickly

as you can," what a simplification of everything that would have been! But then women liked these emotional occasions. And suddenly came the thought of Phoebe—enduring far more at this moment than anything that he could imagine with all his keen sympathy—of Phoebe being decked in bridal white over the dark, bitter secret in her heart. It was dreadful that there seemed no escape for reasonable beings from such tawdry tortures as these! He was now so nervous that his throat felt stiff like wood, and he would have given much for a shameless draught of Mr. Nelson's cherished Madeira.

He began again reading over the list of unvarying Nelsons and their native localities, in sheer despair, when the door opened and Mary said softly:

"Owen."

He jumped towards her.

"What is it?" he asked, scared by her pale face.

"Nothing. Only Mr. Nelson has come. They're waiting for you. You are to go down the side stairway and join Mr. Nelson in the panelled room. Then he'll walk with you to the hall. Stop near the little table with the silver candlesticks. Sally is there now. I'll go and get Phoebe."

She was turning away when Owen caught her arm. His face was as pale as hers.

"Mary . . . there's something terrible about all this. It's like a . . . a . . . an execution."

"Oh, Owen!" said Mary, and she couldn't help smiling, as sharp as was the pain at her heart.

He stood gazing at her fixedly.

"Just a minute, Mary . . . I can't think somehow. It's a beastly feeling."

"Shall I get you a glass of wine?"

"No . . . no," he said shamefacedly. "But Mary . . . I want to thank you for all you've done. . . . " He stooped down and kissed her suddenly. "Bless you, dear," he said. "Now I'll go."

He found Mr. Nelson waiting for him, attired also in a frock-coat, or as he would have said a "Prince Albert," of perfect preservation but quaint cut. He held the hand that Owen gave him, and put his other over it in quite a touchingly paternal manner. "God bless you, my dear boy," he said. "This is a trying hour for you. The bride's sensibilities do not have all the 'excursions and alarums' to themselves on such occasions. I recall the

day of my own wedding as I look at you. I regret to say that my chief happiness was deferred by Providence until I was sixty, but I clearly recall the terror that I felt: my heart might have been that of a reluctant maiden."

At the thought of Mr. Nelson with the heart of a "reluctant maiden" beating aginst his austere ribs, Owen gave a sickly laugh.

"To tell you the truth, sir," he said, the old Harrow speech coming back to him in this upsetting moment, "I'm in a thumping funk."

"I take it," said Mr. Nelson, "that in modern idiom you mean to signify that you are considerably agitated."

"Yes, sir," said Owen humbly.

"I had thought of such a contingency," said the old gentleman, with what on any other face would have been a roguish smile. "Here . . . " he reached behind him and brought forth an actual bumper of Madeira. "Drink this, my dear boy."

And Owen drank it with enthusiasm to the last honey-coloured drop.

As they entered the flower-decked hall together he saw only a confused blur of faces, then after a moment or two he recognised Sally, standing very straight and thin, with Hannah's little figure in its neat brown *gros-grain* close beside her.

Behind the altar, improvised by Mary, the Reverend Henry, a tall handsome man of sixty, was standing quietly, his hands crossed over his white stole. Everything was very still. An oriole began its liquid fluting in the syringa near the door, and somewhere the trilling note of a tree-toad told of coming rain. Owen stared at the roses on the altar and the candle-flames,—darkly saffron in the daylight with pale-blue centres, bowing softly this way and that in the mild summer air. He noticed also how a little green beetle, climbing awkwardly over one of the roses, made it sway and nod. Then a stir among the others and the tilt of their faces upward made him know that Phoebe was coming down the stairs. His heart began to pound painfully. He felt that the blood had left his face; his lips were cold against each other. He, too, looked up. Yes, there, with Mary's arm about her, she was coming down towards him.

Mary had set a chaplet of white roses on her hair, and fastened a sash of silver gauze under her small breasts.

From her girdle to her little feet in their silver shoes (a pair of Mary's) the soft, thin stuff hung in unbroken folds. Ophelia, on her way with flowers to be the bride of death, could not have looked more white and sweetly wild and virginal. A Delphic trance of awed inspiration and bated fear shone from the great bright eyes fixed on emptiness. Her very lips—the lips that Sally had thought too red for a young girl—were "white as her smock."

Mary brought her to her father, who in turn took her icy little hand and led her to Owen's side. There he left her, stepping back again to Mary, his old face working childishly with emotion.

Owen looked down at the slight form, so virginal, yet that was not a virgin's, and his very bones seemed melting with compassion and vain tenderness. . . . He longed to take her hand and hold it fast in his. But she did not see this yearning look; her eyes were fixed before her, wild and bright in her face of a rapt snow-maiden.

The Reverend Henry had a beautiful, sonorous voice. His Virginian accent, broad and homely, gave it a sort of affectionate intimacy, as though the two standing before him were peculiarly under his protection.

With gentle deliberation he spoke the opening phrases of the solemn service:

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God in the days of man's innocency. . . . "

The slight figure began to tremble. Owen's hand went out, regardless of all due forms, and grasping hers held it safe and warm.

" . . . Into this holy estate these two persons present come now to be joined. If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together let him now speak, or else hereafter forever hold his peace."

The oriole sang on and on in the pause that followed, but no one spoke.

Then fixing his kindly black eyes on Phoebe and Owen he continued, addressing them directly:

"I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that, if either of you know any impedi-

ment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it. . . ."

These words seemed overwhelmingly terrible to the man, knowing as he did the piteous secret of the girl beside him. His other hand went over hers. He had never read the marriage ceremony. If it had been devised to torture her it could not have been more aptly worded. The blood rushed into his face. His eyes were fixed angrily on the prayerbook held by the rector, with its black cover and large gilt cross.

But then came the first tremendous question, put directly to him, Owen Randolph. Somehow that this stranger should address him by his Christian name made it doubly impressive, as though all lesser conventions were swept aside by this great covenant into which he was entering.

"Owen, wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?"

Prompted by the rector, Owen said "I will" in a quiet voice, and this time catching Phoebe's now fluttering glance, as of a bird seeking some escape from a closed room, he smiled at her.

The warmth of life seemed restored to her by that smile, the colour flew once more to her white lips and cheeks. To the like question, now put to her, she whispered "I will," her eyes still on Owen's.

Then came the enquiry:

"Who giveth this woman to be married to this man?" and Phoebe's father moved forward, and said clearly, though tremulously, "I, her father."

This response in words was unusual, but no one in the little company noticed it.

At last Owen slipped the ring engraved with "Kindliness" upon her finger, and said after the rector the words: "With this ring I thee wed, and with all my worldly goods I thee endow: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Then came the prayer "Our Father" and the great appeal beginning "O Eternal God, Creator and Preserver of all Mankind, Giver of all spiritual grace,"—the solemn injunction:

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder";—the pronouncement of Phoebe and Owen as man and wife,—the final blessing:

"God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost, bless, preserve, and keep you: the Lord mercifully with his favour look upon you and fill you with all spiritual benediction and graee; that ye may so live together in this life that in the world to come ye may have life everlasting."

Then came silenee, profound and hushed. The oriole began to sing again. Somewhere far out on the pastures a mare nickered to her April foal. Lastly, Wizzy, escaped from the stable where David had shut him up till the ceremony should be over, eame with an injured whine and rattle of toe-nails along the waxed floor.

Sally gave a nervous laugh, then, with a stir and murmur like people waking out of sleep, the little group broke up and came clustering round with good wishes and friendly cheerfulness.

But in a moment or two Mary took the girl once more up to her little room with its blue roses and memories so tender and so terrible. Wordlessly she helped her to change from her white bridal dress into a suit of silvery linen-tweed (another gift of Mary's). She set the little toque of dark blue velvet on the sorrel hair, gave her her gloves, her handkerchief—then, suddenly weeping, she took her in her arms.

"Bless you, my darling," she whispered, "he will be good to you . . . be good to him."

"May God disown me if I am not good to him!" said the girl passionately. But there were no answering tears in her eyes. Something seemed to hold her heart in bands of steel—joy and fear, too great for tears.

There was a confused tumult of good-byes, then she was in the dog-eart with Owen, who was to drive them himself to Crewe.

"Jinks" and "Jinko," more freakish than ever with the white wedding favours fluttering at their ears, bounded forward. Aunt Polly's Joe on "The Clown" cantered past them to open the first gate. They passed through and she was alone with Owen on the high-road to Crewe—on the high-road of life. . . .

As soon as they had passed Hollybrook Wood he gave her the reins, saying, "Hold these a minute, dear," and

jumping down he took the favours from the cobs' headstalls and tossed them aside.

"I won't have you annoyed with these stupid fripperies," he said, smiling at her. "Thank God they spared us rice and old shoes at least!"

Phoebe felt a passion of gratitude that he had not said anything serious or tender to her. She felt that she could not have borne it.

The cobs sped, sneezing with animal spirits, over the road to Crewe.

XXVI

ON the Pullman Phoebe sat as in a dream, her shoulder against the little travelling-cushion in its scarlet leather case that Owen had slipped behind her. The familiar landscape streaking by looked as foreign to her as Russia or "the still vext Bermoothes." She could see America's round, fuzzy poll in the neat black turban that Mary had trimmed especially for her repeated in a little mirror across the aisle. Owen had said:

"I've put America in the same car with us, Phoebe, because you might need her for something."

Then he had gone off in consultation with the negro porter.

Phoebe looked at her own feet, as they rested on the seat before her, clad in a pair of Mary's shoes with flat, square buckles,—and they seemed as unfamiliar as the landscape. She dimpled suddenly—in spite of the almost gruesome awe that was upon her, and that constant sense of dreadful, gnawing guilt,—remembering how Alice had felt the same way about her feet in the immortal story—and her proposed letter of introduction with its address, "Feet—Alice, Alice—Feet; Alice's Feet, Hearthrug, near the Fender." How fortunate it was that she and Cousin Mary both had "the Talliaferro feet," else she would have had to wear a commonplace pair of her own brown shoes without any buckles. Then, with a startled glance around her, she let the little half-smile drop from her lips.

And now Owen was coming towards her. Her heart seemed to turn over and sit down hard in her breast. This was her simile to herself. Her heart was still sitting

there, on the floor of her spirit so to speak, when he calmly took the opposite seat from which she had withdrawn the buckled shoes, and laid a magazine on her lap.

"These blessed provincial trains make too much racket for any talk," he said, smiling. "I'm going to see what our over-vitalised ex-president proposes as his next move. Are you quite comfy?"

"Yes," murmured Phoebe.

Owen opened a Washington paper, and became absorbed in its contents.

And again Phoebe shared the emotions of Alice when she exclaimed, "Curiouser and curiouser!" It simply could not be true that the big, brown figure opposite, so composedly reading the daily paper, was that of . . . her husband.

She sat up suddenly, the cushion slipping down beside her. Owen, behind the opened sheet did not see this movement—but to America it was visible in the little mirror, and she turned quickly, her pleasant, puffy lips parting in an inquiring smile over her square teeth with the little gap in the middle which caused her to lisp and through which her pink tongue showed when she talked, as she did fluently and often. Then she got up and came over to Phoebe, bending across the arm of the seat with her little swagger of importance.

"You want anything, Miss Phoebe?"

"No, thank you, America."

"Lemme cut yo' book for you, Miss Phoebe."

She lifted it before Phoebe could say "yea or nay" and, returning to her place, began cutting the leaves with one of her hat-pins.

"Curiouser and Curiouser" became the whole world and its contents to Phoebe. That was Uncle Burrell's niece America, who had been born at Nelson's Gift and had never travelled farther than Staunton in all her past days, now on her way to Europe as Mrs. Owen Randolph's maid!

Mrs. Owen Randolph herself shivered at the uncanny improbability of this idea, and suddenly belated homesickness swept over her in a heavy wave. What were they doing now at dear Nelson's Gift? Was her father brooding apart in his great-chair, too sad even for work on his beloved genealogy? Had Sally already gone home, seated in lonely state in the victoria, the lace dome of her parasol

haughtily upheld, and that hard, repressed look on her sallow face, as though "An' I would I could speak upheaving truths." Phoebe shuddered at the memory of that bitter, implacable face.

Was Mary perhaps coaxing dear father now into a little cheerful talk, while Aunt Patty and Lily dismantled the pretty altar, and the Reverend Henry came to say goodbye, with his surplice and stole put away again in his bag? Would Mary sleep tonight in her own little bed with the blue roses, or in the more pompous sumptuousness of the goose-down bed in the "guest chamber"? What were dear "Jimmy Toots" and "King Reddy" and the grey kitten doing? She choked a little at this thought. And poor, poor Wizzy, was he balanced on the seat of the victoria beside the unsympathetic Sally, his little, crooked back making him slip miserably with the motion? . . . All those roses that Cousin Mary had cut—they would be dead by night—poor roses! And she had cared for them so tenderly all the spring and summer. There were not vases and bowls enough at Nelson's Gift to hold such heaps of roses. . . . Oh, it was all strange, strange almost past endurance! And Owen seemed far, far way, and almost forbidding, like an indifferent stranger, sitting there so absorbed in everyday questions, while she ranged bewildered through confusing aisles of dread novelty.

As if she had spoken her thought aloud, he put down the paper and came over beside her.

"Homesick, dear?" he asked, and laid his hand on hers.

"A . . . a little," said Phoebe in the low voice that he, like Mary, had learnt meant inner trouble.

He glanced round to see that no one was looking, lifted the little hand in its suède glove and kissed it gently.

"I won't let it last, dear," he said, smiling at her. "We're going to have the most beautiful times together. This is the most trying part of all. Wait until I show you France and England. Tante Suzanne will want to keep us in Normandy I know, but I think England will be better this summer. I've a friend there who has the jolliest little cottage in Norfolk. Just the thing for us. It's on the Norfolk Broads. We can have such fun trawling and shrimping. Did you ever shrimp?"

"No," said Phoebe.

"Do you like sailing?"

"I've only been once or twice—but I wasn't seasick."

"Good!" said Owen. "I'll get a Una-boat—what we call a 'catboat' in America, and we two can go sailing till you're as brown as a nut!"

He talked on, telling her of the charming places that she was to see with him, of the lovable eccentricities of Madame de Mauvigny, of his English friends, who would be so very nice to her, of all sorts of bright, natural, stirring events to come—until her sad mood was quite gone and a sort of tremulous, glad excitement had taken its place. After all, it was through a wonderful fairy tale that her life now lay. She would grasp what sweetness she could with both feverish little hands. Fate had been cruel and niggardly to her. Now she seemed sleeping, drugged by Owen's power—all that could be filched from her while she slept, she, Phœbe, would clutch greedily. The obstinacy, which in her was passionate when roused, like all her other emotions, sprang up and lit her eyes and cheeks. She would take by force all, all that life had wanted to cheat her of,—with strong hands she would take it and hold it fast. She would learn from this new, full existence, opening so dazzlingly before her—she would become a woman cultured, clever, wise, charming. She would make him proud of her. Now she was just a little Virginia country girl, whom for some sweet, mysterious reason this wonderful, superior being had elected to love—had made his wife. She would rise to him—oh! she had so much to learn, but she would be tireless—she would strive endlessly, unwearyingly until she was worthy to stand beside him as his equal. No, not his equal; no one in all the world—man or woman—could be his equal, but at least as his companion, of whom he could think with pride.

Owen, delighted to have dispelled her sad mood, talked on until it was time for lunch.

That, her first meal with him alone, seemed a wonderful event to Phœbe. He made her drink a glass of light wine, and the unusual stimulus, together with the new ambition and eager will that had flared up within her, brought such sparkling life into her face that those nearby could not keep their eyes away from its flame-like beauty. For Phœbe was "*journalière*" to a degree in her looks, and this, her wedding-day, chanced to be also a day of physical loveliness with her.

"No . . . no . . ." she told herself, the wine singing its little song of enchantment in her young veins, "I will not

suffer more than I can help. I will be as happy as I can."

But when they reached New York, late that night, and the lift had whirled her up to the fifteenth floor (Owen liked to be high in good air, and away from the clatter of the streets), when she stood alone in the false artisticness of the little sitting-room, while Owen went with America and the bell-boy to see that the former's room was near enough and comfortable—dread and the old sick terror closed down upon her.

"Poor little child. . . . Poor little child . . ." thought Owen, seeing her white, set face from the corridor before he entered; "what torments of apprehension must be racking her. . . ."

And his own heart contracted painfully, for it seemed to him frightful, the idea of possessing a woman wholly, whose heart—so lately all another's—must even in its sick rebound from desperate love to desperate loathing—shrink with unspeakable repulsion from the thought of a new lover's embrace. And yet, for her own sake, sooner or later. . . .

And, great and real as Phoebe's dread was, it had only indirectly to do with the thought of Richard's having been her lover. She so hated him that, in the abstract, the thought of belonging wholly to another was not so awful to her. She felt that to belong wholly to someone else would seal her away as in a tomb from that terrible past. No, it was rather that all power of such emotion in her had become paralysed,—the chords of passion were loosed and numb. Besides, her worship for Owen demanded striving and sacrifice—not amorous exultation. If she could have given her life for his she would have leapt toward the knife, or over the abyss with a little laugh of joy. But she had no fire of love to give him. . . . The fire of love seemed to her a lurid, smoky flame coiling darkly in the grim cellar of life. What she longed to give him was adoration in the sunlight—in the eyes of the morning. She thought of him as having placed a crown of light upon her sorrowful, disgraced head. To have bathed his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hairs of her head would have seemed to her only a fitting and natural action.

She stood there now, not knowing that he watched her from the outer corridor, and her hands went piteously to her breast, and her eyes were fixed on the door of the next

room with that look in them that he had once seen before—the look of a hare caught suddenly in a weighted trap.

He entered and, going up to her, put his arm about her shoulders.

"Dear heart, you look tired to death," he said in a matter-of-fact voice. "I think if you go straight to bed it will be the best thing. I'll send America to you and order a light supper on a tray. I'm rather done myself. Weddings are sad amusements, aren't they?"

He pointed to an opposite door.

"That is the door of my room. If you want anything in the night, you've only to call me. I'll leave it open."

And, kissing her softly, he went to fetch America.

The largeness of Phoebe's nature did not let her misjudge him, as another young girl might have done. She did not attribute his action to a cool indifference, but when she had dismissed America for the night she sank on her knees beside the glittering hotel bed, and thanked God with humble awe that He had given poor, unworthy her to a man so almost incredibly tender and considerate. She knew with a sure instinct that he had divined her shrinking dread and the confusion of all her senses, and he had done *that* for her. His love was not a selfish appetite, but a great deep like the sea which could wait upon the moon of joy. Oh, she could give him all, all—some day, when she was not so utterly weary with remorse and vain regret—when guilt was washed away by the tears of blood that her heart shed every hour. . . . And she crept into her lonely bed, broken but happy, and went to sleep with the ring engraved "kindliness" against her lips.

Next morning came a rap at her door and his voice calling:

"Little slug-a-bed! Coffee's here. . . . Slip on a dressing-gown and come have it with me!"

Flushing and paling like apple flowers in a wind, she gave a hasty brush to her hair, threw on the little cap of old Honiton with its pink rosettes over either ear (Mary had really provided Phoebe with all the prettiest part of her improvised *trousseau*), and, slipping into the pink gown that went with it, slid shyly through the half-open door, looking like a figure from one of Morland's paintings.

"What a little eighteenth century picture you are in

that cap, Phoebe!" said Owen, smiling. "I needn't ask whether you rested well."

"Oh, Cousin Owen, I . . ." began Phoebe, and then stopped short, abashed by the delighted little whinny of laughter that broke from Owen.

"Really, Mrs. Randolph," he said, and began to laugh again.

"You do love to tease me, don't you?" said Phoebe, laughing herself. "I must get used to it, I suppose." And she sat down at the table and began to pour coffee with as matronly a manner as she could assume.

Owen, watching her serious face and the little dignified airs that she gave her pretty hands, thought boyishly:

"Oh, Lord! . . . What a painfully bewitching child. . . . There's no fool like an old fool. . . . I'm in for it and no mistake. . . . ."

It was all he could do to keep from going round to her chair, bending back her head with its stately pose of marital dignity, and kissing her full and warm on her parted lips.

"Do you take one lump, or two—or none?" asked Phoebe sedately, with the sugar-tongs poised.

"Half a lump, please, Cousin Phoebe," said he as sedately.

Phoebe flushed.

"Don't tease me any more this time," she pleaded; "I'll really try never, never to do it again."

"How are you going to manage that half lump?" he asked, smiling.

Phoebe looked anxiously about.

"If there was a nut-cracker . . ." she suggested at length.

Owen laughed and, leaning over, took a lump of sugar and broke it in his fingers.

"There was one, you see," he said, smiling at her. This light nonsense he told himself was the best thing; she looked puzzled but happy under it like a child that feels safe with some trusted grown-up who does bewildering things with it.

"Do you dress quickly or slowly, Mrs. Randolph?" he asked as he drank his coffee.

"Oh . . . quickly!" said she.

Owen looked at her consideringly.

"Phoebe," said he, "don't you think 'Missis' a very ugly title?"

"It . . . it isn't pretty . . . is it?" she said doubtfully.

"Quite the reverse. And 'husband' has always seemed to me a singularly repellent word. Suppose we just pretend we're sweethearts off on a delightful, scampish sort of adventure. Take off that dear little air of responsibility and be just little Phoebe with me."

"I'll be anything you want me to be—anything!" said the girl, with suppressed emotion.

"You dear! You 'winsome,' as they say in Devon, . . ." said Owen, making love to her across the table in spite of himself. "You're just a delicious 'honey-pot' like Mary of Scotland."

Phoebe blushed and blushed, hanging her head.

Owen watched her for a moment, then pulled himself together and got up.

"Do you mind if I smoke a pipe in here?" he asked.

"Oh, please do!" said Phoebe.

Somehow she had never felt quite sure that she was really a married person, until she saw him lounging comfortably near her in a big chair with his old "briar" in his mouth.

"Does it *really* taste good?" she asked, after some seconds of thoughtful contemplation.

"Excellent—will you try it?" he asked gravely, offering it to her. The gay little imp that had so long lain sick in her peeped up all at once, and she put forward her red mouth and took a whiff or two.

"Oh! How *nasty!* . . . How can you!" she cried, coughing and scrubbing her lips with her small handkerchief. "I think men's mouths must have a different lining from ours."

"They have," said he seriously.

"Have they really?"

"Yes. They're lined with asbestos, and yours with rose-leaves."

"Oh, Cousin . . . I mean *Owen!*" exclaimed Phoebe. "You do talk such nonsense to me."

"Don't you like it?" asked he, laughing.

"Why, yes—I do," said Phoebe, with a little air of surprise.

"Then if you like it, and I like it, there's no use fatiguing our brains by unnecessary wisdom."

Suddenly Phoebe rose and went behind his chair. He felt her arms steal round his neck and her cheek pressed against his.

"I do love you!" she whispered softly.

Owen felt like crying "Hands off! Fair play!" but he only lifted the arm that lay on his shoulder and, kissing it, got up with a long stretch, pipe in hand.

"We mustn't be too lazy," he said; "there's lots we must do today."

"Must we?" said Phoebe, looking interestedly at the little pink bedroom slipper that dangled from her toe.

"Mh-mh," said Owen, using the Virginia affirmative, so convenient when a pipe is in one's mouth.

He took a note-book from his pocket, and began reading her a list, standing up before her.

"Things for Phoebe. A steamer-coat, light-weight. A fur coat to the heels. A steamer trunk. A beret or motor bonnet. A motor veil. A foot-muff. A fitted bag, no—Mary scratched that out. We'll wait for London. Two pairs of Dent's gloves. Some woollen stockings. A warm dressing gown for steamer."

He stopped reading and looked at her. She was twisting her fingers together and her face was scarlet.

Owen really had some psychic powers. Where Phoebe was concerned he was a finished mind-reader. He threw the little book on the table, and knelt before her, a hand on either arm of her chair.

"Phoebe, my sweet," he said, "are you going to be a naughty girl and hurt me with false pride about taking some of the 'worldly goods' I endowed you with yesterday?"

Phoebe's hands went up to her face.

"If . . . if . . . only I had *something* of my own," she whispered piteously.

Owen pulled down her hands and held them.

"Look at me, Phoebe," he said.

Her eyes came slowly up full of tears.

"You said for the second time just now that you love me."

"Yes."

"And I love you."

"Yes . . . thank you," murmured Phoebe.

She was too enchanting. Owen reached up and caught her to his breast for an instant, then he put her far back

in the chair again. It was exactly the embrace that a child bestows on an adored doll, but Owen did not at all regard Phoebe as a doll.

"Listen to me, darling baby thing," he said, smiling at her—a little confusedly, had she known the different grades of masculine smiles. "I stopped your father from telling you the other day, but now I'm going to tell you myself. You *have* got something of your own, dear honey-pot; I settled a whole hideous building on you when you unselfishly agreed to be known by the unlovely appellation of 'Missis.' You have exactly ten thousand a year of your very own to buy all the pins necessary for your toilette. Will you be reasonable now? I'll present you with a cheque-book bought with your own money the moment we reach England. In the meantime allow me the honour of being your banker. All these things in Mary's list (except the fur coat—that was *my* idea, and I cling to it with obstinacy), all those things you can present to yourself if you wish. I've nothing at all to do with them."

"Ten . . . ten . . . thou . . ." gasped Phoebe, regaining her breath. She could not achieve the impossible word, and sat gaping at him like a lovely Zany.

"Ten thousand, dear Lady False Pride. If I were to lose all my fortune at one fell swoop you would still be above want and could help me out if you were generously inclined. Come, Phoebe dear, it's customary to make marriage settlements. Your father approved. You say you love me, yet you let a base thing like money come between us the very morning after our marriage—our first morning as man and wife."

He reached out and shook her gently as she lay curled in a soft, little heap, her face hidden again. "Phoebe! Are you going to hurt your 'man' the first time he's in your power?"

Then suddenly her fragrance was all against his face—she held his head against her breast with straining arms, and he heard the sweet, deep rhythm of her heart close to his ear.

"No . . . no. . . . I wouldn't hurt you for the whole round world. I'll take anything. . . . I'll take a million if you want me to. . . ." She pushed him back and looked eagerly at him "Give me *two* million if you like," she said, "and I'll take it and use it every bit up!"

"My pretty! My winsome!" cried Owen again, between

tears and laughing, and suddenly he pulled down her mouth to his. But scarcely had their lips touched when he sprang up, saying gaily if a little thickly, "Now, let me see how quickly you can dress, after all your boasting. I'll phone Purley to fetch the motor. Shall we go for the furs first?"

"Anywhere . . . anything you like," said Phoebe recklessly, so rejoiced was she to see that she had not hurt him too grievously, and was forgiven.

When they got back to the hotel the motor looked as though it had returned from a Christmas shopping tour. Owen went with Phoebe to their sitting-room, and, finding that America had returned, left her in the care of that young person, saying that he should be gone until evening, as he had some business that must be attended to.

"Shall we have dinner here?" he asked. "Or shall I take you out somewhere. It'll be rather muggy in the cafés I'm afraid."

"No . . . here, please," said Phoebe. The memory of their breakfast together still thrilled her softly.

"Very well. Purley will order lunch to be sent up here. You can talk it over with him. Take good care of her, America."

"I cert'ny will, Mr. Owen," said America, showing the little gap in her teeth.

As he closed the door Phoebe turned to the young negress, whom she was very fond of. "Oh, America," she said; "*hug* me!"

"You sweet, sugar lady!" cried the other, squeezing her to her breast with enthusiasm.

"Ain't you got de king of de wor'l, do?" she asked, holding Phoebe off and devouring her shy face with her affectionate ox-eyes.

"Oh, America," sighed Phoebe, sinking down and stretching out a small foot for her ministrations. "Please, when you say your prayers tonight, pray that nothing dreadful will happen. I'm too happy. It makes me afraid."

XXVII

BEING too well known in New York to risk having his wedding journey broken into by reporters, Owen had registered at the hotel under the name of "Owen Reed."

As Mr. and Mrs. Owen Reed, he and Phoebe also figured on the passenger list of the *Lorraine*.

The crossing was uneventful, the passengers uninteresting. Phoebe went in to dinner every day with a fresh knot of lilies-of-the-valley at the breast of the white chiffon frock. This attention on the part of Owen struck her as the crowning touch of all his lavish goodness to her; it gave him quite away as a bridegroom to the astute "trippers," who yet were fortunately too much in awe of his personality to venture on the usual pleasantries—even at a distance.

"Mr. Reed" reminded "Mrs. Reed" that he had not taken a *cabine de luxe* for the same reason that prompted his assumption of their temporary name. It would have set them apart as targets for the crassly vulgar. But Phoebe loved her simple, white "shipshape" cabin in any case, and the strangely sweet, not too familiar intimacy that it brought with her "man"—as he had once so thrillingly called himself.

She grew to look for the delicious impropriety of his advent from his own cabin across the way—in all the abandon of braces, to brush his thick locks before her little mirror—using the two handleless tortoise-shell brushes, which she always wondered how he managed to wield so dexterously. And he, while shaving every morning, would glimpse the sorrel head, in its cap of Honiton with the pink rosettes, peeping out from her door, above the violet cloth of the dressing gown that he had chosen for her the day before sailing; there was Phoebe reconnoitring to reach the bathroom.

Sometimes he came and read bits to her from Tolstoy's "Cossacks," which he was enjoying to the full again after a six years' gap. And she would lie on the little couch under the port-holes and, gazing at his face as he read, see him as Olyenin and wonder how Marianka could have been so cruel.

The arrival at Havre was a new delight. The strange tongue, so exciting to her romantic fancy; the train with its vertebræ of small foreign carriages, and the little irascible engine, like a mechanical toy; the keen, different scent and tang of the alien air—all these things stirred her like a strange tale told at twilight. Then came the rattling, bumping, swaying flight to Paris—the feneeless landscape queerly striped with bands of culture, at last, the dark-

gold aura of Paris on the night, and the final descent in the big *Gare du Nord.*

They had received a telegram by the pilot.

"Suis à Paris pour le mois de Juillet. Pauvre Gaston souffrant. Viens sans faute à l'hôtel Mauvigny rue La Pérouse. Salutations affectueuses. Embrasse la petite épouse pour Tante Suzanne."

"The old dear!" said Owen affectionately. "I had no idea she would be in Paris this time of year. Uncle Gaston's gout, of course. But how nice for you, dear. The hôtel Mauvigny is one of the most charming houses in Paris. Tante Suzanne will spoil you even more than I've done."

"That would be hard to do," said Phoebe, smiling at him.

Louis, the ancient footman, came trotting towards them, touching his hat like a wound-up toy as he advanced. He had a special *culte* for Owen.

"Monsieur Randolph . . . Madame . . ." he panted, wreathed in smiles. *"Madame la Comtesse attend dans l'auto."*

"Bien, Louis. Comment ça va?" said Owen, shaking his old hand.

"Bien, M'sieu. Bien, M'sieu. Très bien," galloped Louis; then he seemed to gather the *faquins* together by a lift of his eyebrows. They came in a bunch, trundling bags and boxes. America and Purley followed in the rear. In a few minutes Owen had assisted Phoebe into the motor and the arms of Tante Suzanne.

The motor had a little electric rose-globed light in its roof, and was lined with a pale, pinkish cloth. When Phoebe emerged from that voluminous and hearty embrace she looked upon the most amazing old lady possible to conceive.

Madame de Mauvigny was seventy if she was a day. She was attired in a marvellous confection of Irish lace and embroidery over bright rose-colour. On her elaborate white wig, as luxurious as the *"crinière"* of a French war horse in the time of Roland, was a basket hat composed entirely of pink rose-buds, and her large, plump hands were covered by rose-coloured suède gloves. As Phoebe bent forward to receive her kiss she noticed the still natu-

rally jet-black eyebrows, not unlike Owen's, over vivacious golden eyes full of sparkling lights.

"*Ma petite,*" cried the old lady, holding Phoebe off in her strong, vigorous hands. "You are charming! What is she like, eh? A Moreland? A Romney? Ha! *C'est ça!* —she is like the famous Emma. Perhaps not *quite* so beautiful—but more *raffinée.* More intelligent, *pour sur! Je t'aime déjà, ma mignonne.* Kiss me queek!" wound up Tante Suzanne, who had really acquired an unconscious French accent in speaking English during her seven and thirty years' sojourn in France.

"Forgive my hodge-podge of French and English, dear child," she continued the next moment. "My language is piebald, but my meaning is solid gold. . . . like my heart. Eh, Owen, you solemn rascal?"

"Your heart," said Owen, kissing a pink glove, "is above rubies."

Tante Suzanne chuckled pleasedly.

"Is that the way he won you, my pigeon?" she asked Phoebe. "With that 'honey tongue' of his?—Eh!" she broke off with a sigh that burst from her all in a piece, like a little puff through a broken pane. *"Qu'ils sont heureux, les amoureux!* I remember so well my wedding journey with *ce pauvre Gaston.* We went over the Brenner pass in a *diligence* for sheer romance. It smelt abominably musty and stable-y—*je me souviens*—but it might have been Cinderella's coach for all we knew. He lifted me down when we arrived, and carried me over the threshold like a Roman bridegroom. Poor dear!—his gout wouldn't let him lift a kitten now. Have you ever had symptoms of gout, my dear boy?"

"No, dear auntie," said Owen, laughing.

"Ah, *les amoureux, les amoureux . . .*" sighed the old lady again, and she went off into a sort of dream for a moment or two.

Then she roused, preened herself, adjusted her bangles, her hat, her gloves, and poured forth volleys of questions about everyone and everything "at home," as she still called Virginia.

While Owen answered her Phoebe was gazing out at the dark, summer beauty of the horse-chestnuts in the *Champs Elysées* and the curving lines of electric lights sparkling as for a *fête.* The street was nearly empty at this hour. A shower had just passed, bringing out that odour of

drenched foliage and pavement so peculiar to Paris. More than ever the girl seemed to herself to be gliding through a wonderful dream.

"Eh, my turtle-doves," said Tante Suzanne, with a sudden note of deprecation in her voice. "I have excuses to make you. *Je suis désolée mais que faire?* Diana Wrexborough descended on me yesterday with two children, a bonne and a tutor. She's on the way to her sister in Bretagne, where she'll leave them all for the rest of the summer—and only stops two days with us. But the hôtel Mauvigny is not elastic. You, my poor dears, will have to put up with one room between you and a dressing-room. Still, that won't be such a desolating hardship for *nouveaux-mariés,* eh?" she ended, and tweaked Phoebe's ear with a very roguish smile.

The girl flared under her words and touch like a blown coal. Tante Suzanne lifted amused eyebrows and glanced at Owen for sympathetic enjoyment of his bride's naïve confusion. He was gazing out of the window with what she thought an expression peculiar under the circumstances.

Suddenly, in her thought, she struck as it were her astral forehead. Light had glimmered in her Gallicised mind. "*Tiens!*" said she to herself. "I had completely forgotten how touchy is the modesty of Americans!—Eh, *bon Dieu!* One mustn't mention coats to Potiphar's wife, nor so much as a sofa cushion to an American bride!"

Thus reflecting, she deftly changed the subject.

"Diana is very keen to know your bride," she said to Owen.

"I've told you about her, Phoebe," said Owen, coming to the rescue. "The Duchess of Wrexborough. You'll love each other, I think."

"*Pour sur,*" said Tante Suzanne, nodding. "And the child couldn't have a better influence than Diana."

The Duchess of Wrexborough came forward to meet them when they entered the salon, rising slight and immensely tall in her white tea-gown. Her little deer-head, so unmistakably and beautifully English, with its short nose and up-curving Greek chin and mouth, was crowned by a great braid of ink-black hair, and from under straight brows, that met like those sung by Theocritus, looked eyes as softly clear and changeful as blue opals.

"How very nice to see you again!" she said to Owen.

Then, taking Phoebe's hands in both hers, she looked smiling into her eyes. "I have so wanted to know you," she said in her lovely low voice. "Owen and I have been such friends for over twenty years . . . ever since my nursery days. . . . I hope you'll let me be fond of you, too."

"Oh . . . thank you!" said Phoebe in her pretty way, and her heart rushed into her eyes.

"She's a perfect sweet!" said Diana Wrexborough, turning to Owen, and drawing Phoebe to her side.

Surely, surely, this was a dream! She was certainly just another Alice in Wonderland, and presently this beautiful Duchess would turn sharply and say, "Off with her head!"

"Take off your hat, *chérie*, and let us see you better," said Tante Suzanne. "Take off her hat, Owen."

Phoebe handed him the little toque, and the shaded candle-light shone on her beautiful forehead.

"Don't you think she's very like the Romney of Emma Hamilton with the dog in her arms, Diana?" asked the old lady, just touching Phoebe's hair with her pink-gloved hand. *"N'est-ce-pas épatant?"*

"Yes . . . very," said Diana, "only she's so much finer. I mean in the French sense . . . *raffinée*. . . ."

"Just what I said!" cried Tante Suzanne triumphantly.

Owen, who, as usual, divined correctly that Phoebe was beginning to feel a little as though she were an *objet d'art* under amiable but critical consideration, now remarked that he thought the most beautiful sight in the world would be that of food—as he and Phoebe had had nothing since a glass of wine and some sandwiches at four o'clock.

"Je suis une vieille dénaturée!" exclaimed Madame de Mauvigny tragically. "You poor children! Come with me at once! All is prepared. And you, too, Diana. We can sit by and see the love-birds eat."

That night, when she was alone, at last, in the "one room between you," Phoebe stood gazing at the lovely old Louis-Quinze bed, as though it were some powerful sorcerer in disguise and had already cast a trancing spell upon her.

Below in the quiet street she heard a chauffeur's cry of *"Porte!"* The great doors of the porte-cochère opened and clanged again. The dull rumble of a motor entering jarred through the building. It was Tante Suzanne's eldest son, Jack de Mauvigny, returning from a house party at Versailles. Then she heard a new voice speaking

in French and the low, lovely voice of Diana answering. Tante Suzanne's vigorous laugh rang out. Then Owen spoke. The voices came nearer, died away. All was quiet in the strange, beautiful house that seemed built of such stuff as dreams are made of. . . .

The afternoon following Phoebe's arrival Tante Suzanne and Diana spent the most delightful hours ransacking Paris for pretty things in which to array her. They were exactly like two eager children over a doll which they have been given *carte blanche* to dress.

At last Owen said, with a masculine note in his voice not to be gainsaid by females who had "let him in" for several thousand pounds' worth of kickshaws, "*I* am going to take Phoebe off alone, and get her something that *I* myself choose, *by* myself!"

The replete shopperesses smiled indulgently, and, hailing a taxi, Owen handed the girl in, sprang in after her, and called an address to the chauffeur that took them far into the old quarter of the town.

As they got away from the more crowded thoroughfares he put his hat on his knees, crossed his hands on his stick and, leaning his chin on them, smiled down at as much of her profile as her hat left visible.

"Do you mind my pouncing on you and taking you off all for myself like a greedy ogre?" he asked.

Phoebe shook her head vehemently—but she did not look at him, and sat still as a mouse, her lashes curving downward.

Owen bent and glanced under the brim of the big black hat that Diana had just chosen for her.

"Has the cat stolen your tongue, as they say to children?"

Phoebe shook her head again, overcome with an immeasurable shyness at being thus alone with him for the first time on that especial day.

"You'll have to show me, or I can't believe you," he teased.

Phoebe smiled in spite of herself, and a little tip of coral stole out between her pretty teeth.

He caught her to his side.

"My winsome! My wife. . . ." he whispered.

So does the full possession of a loved woman work on some men—the finest—changing discreeter emotion into

the extravagant magic of unweighed passion and deep, almost melancholy tenderness. And Phoebe was of Helen's brood; her kiss remained like a sweet, clinging fire that many waters of rationality could not drown. Even in far-off China Richard recalled sometimes with an angry hunger the wild nectar that had lain on her lips that night of May.

She crouched now, quivering in Owen's clasp, one dreadful question burning through her. Was she then shameless, utterly shameless? . . . A creature without moral sense, without sense of decency . . . that she should feel this timorous, sweet delight under his touch and words? . . . "Oh, but this is different!" she pleaded to her own thrilled, accusing heart. "I thought that other was love . . . but this . . . this *is* love!" But her heart ruthlessly answered "Shameless! Shameless!"

Yet Phoebe was of Helen's, not Phryne's, strain. Owen held her, gently now, a little longer; then, lifting one of her hands, kissed it and set her free.

A pang of unspeakable bitterness, rank and envenomed, had shot through him as he remembered that the slight form yielding so softly against his side had been in the embrace of another man. To have faced that fact with affectionate compassion was one thing; to realise it in the midst of a throe of passionate love was another. She was now his own, his wife—all the desire of his manhood—quintessentially refined by years of abstinence from the lighter toys of love—yearned towards her. And yet . . . and yet . . . of that lovely body would be born the child of another man. . . .

When the chauffeur stopped at the address that he had given he said:

"Would you mind if we put off my present till tomorrow? . . . I feel suddenly so sick of shops. . . . Suppose we go out to Versailles and have dinner there? . . . I'll send Tante Suzanne a *petit bleu*."

"Oh, I'd love not to shop any more!" cried Phoebe eagerly. "I'd much rather go somewhere with you."

That evening Diana said, as they exchanged good-nights: "When all the pretty things we chose today are finished, mind you both come to me in England! I'm going to shut Wrexborough House next week. You're to come to me in the country."

"At Gaunt's Hill or Mivvern?" asked Owen.

"Oh, Mivvern, of course. The Thames is my joy at this season."

XXVIII

LONDON rather overwhelmed Phoebe at first sight, it was so wonderfully grim and mysterious after Paris, but its use of a language she could understand unsealed once more the vials of America's volubility, which the French tongue had somewhat stayed.

They sat informally together in Phoebe's private sitting-room at the Ritz, and partook genially of pigeon pie. The servant who brought it had been dismissed by Phoebe, who wanted to relieve her surcharged feelings by personal chatter with that brown bit of home, America Vespuccia Byrd.

They were stopping in town overnight, on their way to Mivvern, as Owen had to attend to several matters.

Meanwhile Phoebe and America discussed the pigeon pie.

"Oh, America," cried Phoebe. "Do you know we're in England, and this is 'pigeon-pasty' we are eating? You *might* think it was pigeon pie from its looks, but don't forget it's *really* 'pigeon-pasty,' America."

"Tases jes' like good ole Faginia pigeon-pie tuh *me*," announced America, lisping more than ever from sheer excitement.

"And that sky up there," continued her mistress, waving her fork, "is *London* sky, America."

America goggled her large eyes at it.

"It's dee spit image uv Faginia sky, Miss Phoebe," said she, chewing genteelly, with her puffy lips pursed together. Then she added:

"Miss Phoebe, is England in London?"

"No, London's in England."

"What's England in, Miss Phoebe?"

"In the sea," said Phoebe, laughing.

"Great day in dee mawnin!" cried America, "s'posin' de sea ris in de night and kivvered it an' we-all like dat red-sea done Pha-ry-oh? . . . What you tell me dat fuh, Miss Phoebe? I ain't goin' res' easy in my bed tonight, thinkin' of how we's right in dee sea. But tain't *red*, dat's one comfort. I seed 'nuff of it comin' over to know *dat*."

Phoebe was too much bent on her own thoughts to follow her closely. She held a nectarine towards America.

"This," she said, "is a nectarine—an English nectarine. Did you ever see a nectarine before, America? . . . Isn't it *curious?*"

America eyed it cynically. She was determined not to show too much astonishment over things no matter how unusual.

"Jes' looks tuh *me* like a sorter stark-nekkid peach, Miss Phoebe."

"Oh, you funny thing! What do you mean by stark nekkid?"

"Well, sometimes hit means one thing an' sometimes another. *Dis* time hit means all dee fuzz is off'n dat neeteril—or whatever you calls it, an' hit looks perceisely like a peach what's done take off its flannel drawers."

Phoebe got up and hugged the woolly head.

"America!" she cried. "If I hadn't brought you I'd have died of homesickness! . . . You're such a comfort, America! And, oh! you're *so* funny!"

"I likes bein' funny when I *means* to be," said America shrewdly, "but sometimes Mr. Owen he larfs at me when I ain't *thinkin'* of funniness. Dat sho is upsetting."

"You mustn't mind, Rikky. He laughs at me, too."

"Oh, I ain't *mindin'*," said America; "I'm jus' noticin'."

Phoebe amused Owen, on their way to the play, by a mimicked account of this conversation. One of her reactions had come over her, and she had again determined to be "just as happy as she could."

As she was Helen's kin, Owen's refrain from passionate love-making piqued while it gave her relief from her self-torturing thoughts. Now she could love him secretly, without that torn feeling of guilt. She could wear the red rose of love with a difference. That evening he gave her a string of lovely pearls. The child looked exquisite with those moony globules lying at the rise of her white breast, but, as the thought of what they symbolised came to him, he winced like a man struck upon a green wound.

It was in these days that he faced his feeling towards Richard and knew it to be hatred; knew that in some moods there would be danger for them both, should he come suddenly on Richard. He felt the strength of his own hands to be a terrible force in those moments, for he imagined them closing round a human throat—pressing and pressing—till the eyes set and the tongue protruded.

When he looked at Phoebe, and felt his love for her rise at flood in his heart, he knew that he was first primeval man, and then, far, far removed, a civilised and philosophic being. What in those moments he craved, even more than he craved the contact of her sweet body, was the feel of his enemy's flesh between his fingers. How was he to control, without appearing to do so, the naked savage in him, were Richard to come suddenly again into their life together, as he might do at any moment? For, capricious as was Richard's nature, Owen did not believe that the East would long hold him. How was he to act with the coolness that, for Phoebe's own sake, the future demanded of him? Any marked, or even noticeable, difference in his manner to Richard might light a fuse that would hoist their house of secrets as high as Arcturus.

He grew thin in these days. Like poor Sally, he "eat his heart," and its mangled nerves made all his life one ache.

They arrived at the country station about six o'clock the next afternoon, and got into the musty fly which Purley had in waiting. It struck Phoebe as very odd indeed that a duchess shouldn't send to fetch her guests from the station. It seemed on the same line as saying plain "Ma'am" and "Sir" to the sovereigns of England. Then Owen reminded her that they had been unable to say by what train they would arrive.

Another slight shock awaited her at the house. Diana was not there to receive her.

Mivvern was not an old house, but it was very charming and friendly, and Diana called it her "print-frock place." She said that one always had one's happiest times in a print-frock, and that being at Gaunt's Hill was like wearing a peeress's robe of velvet, and ermine, at a Coronation, with a stuffy coronet tugging at one's hair.

From the windows of her bedroom Phoebe saw the suave, plushy lawns slanting to the river that shook a little sequin of light here and there between its fringing trees: a huge Lebanon cedar, from under which some servants were clearing away the tea things; and far, and faint on the summer air, like an old wash drawing, the dome of St. Paul's and the brownish-mauve haze formed by the breath of the huge town.

"Oh, America," sighed she, thinking of Diana's absence. "Aren't English customs strange?"

"Gawd, he knows dey is, as de ole 'ooman said when she found a pants button in her hard-b'iled aigg," responded America feelingly—for she was quick-witted and knew exactly to what Phoebe alluded. "Dee duchess lady, she lets you come up in a ole hack all gaumed with musk (America meant "must"), and *den* she ain't hyuh to say 'howdy'!"

"Of course, it's just *English,* Rikky."

"Faginia's good 'nuff fo' me," sniffed America.

Another tap came at the door.

Phoebe, who was by this time in stays and petticoat, ran to open the door herself, thinking that this must at last be Diana.

She was faced by a tall, smiling lady with a fleece of crinkled lint-white locks dressed à la Princesse de Galles, who came promptly in, saying cheerfully:

"How d'ye do, Mrs. Randolph? I'm Francie Bemyss. Diana told me to look after you. What darling little stays! . . . Diana said she bought half Paris for you. I do so adore looking at frillies, don't you? . . . Have you had some tea? Oh, what perfectly *exquy* hair!"

Phoebe, much embarrassed at thus being found in such frank disarray by an entire stranger, herself elaborately costumed, began to twist up her loose locks, blushing and smiling. But Lady Frances stayed her hand.

"*Do* leave it down!" she pleaded. "I shall tell them your nickname must be 'Godiva.' We're all nicknamed. Bemyss, my husband, you know, is 'The Ancestor.' I'm 'The Lamb' because my hair is so disgustingly like a fleece. Di is called 'Hoppo,' short for 'Hop-o'-my-thumb,' you know, because she's such a darling bean-pole. Wrexborough is 'Horner,' because he's always pulling out some political plum and saying 'See what a great man am I.' Now you'll be 'Godiva.' I *am* so pleased to have got the first chance at you! I'm rather a dab at nicknames. But you haven't said whether you've had tea?"

"Oh, no, thank you . . . please . . . it's so late," said Phoebe.

"It *is* rather late," admitted her visitor. Then she seemed deliciously overcome by America, whom she suddenly glimpsed for the first time.

"Oh, what a *darling* nigger!" she cried. "How dreadfully *chic* of you to bring a nigger with you. She's from the States, of course?"

Phoebe, glancing nervously at America, who would rather far have been called a leper than a nigger, said timidly:

"We call them 'colored people' at home."

"Oh, do you? How sweetly quaint. But there's not a ray of colour about her. She's as brown as my boot," and she thrust out her smartly shod foot to let Phoebe see how sound was the comparison.

America, glowering like an offended queen of the Nubians, snatched up a fluff of lingerie from the bed as though she were angrily plucking a great fowl, and disappeared into the drawing-room.

"I'm afraid you've hurt her feelings," said Phoebe anxiously. "She's a dear soul, but her temper's very cranky."

"Fancy now!" cried Lady Frances, opening her milk-blue eyes. "Just fancy a nigger's minding being called a nigger. Ah! . . . Here's Di." She fluttered out as Diana entered, and the latter came and took Phoebe in her arms.

"You look worried, dear," she said. "Has Frances been talking you to death?"

"N-no," hesitated Phoebe. "She was very nice . . . only . . . it's poor Rikky—she *does* so hate being called a nigger!"

(Phoebe was already picking up unconsciously the English intonations. She absorbed things like a little sponge without knowing it.)

"Poor soul! Does she?" asked Diana, surprised in her turn. "Why, I thought they called themselves niggers? They do in their songs, at any rate . . . 'Dere was an old nigger and his name was Uncle Ned.' . . ."

And she hummed the line of the old plantation song. As she ended America's voice came shrill and clear from the dressing-room:

"Yes, ma'am, Mrs. Duchess, ma'am—we calls ourselfs niggers sometimes, but we don't like other folks to do it. Hit's like whoppin' yo' own chile. *You* kin bust him open ef you likes, but you don't want nobody else to ez much ez smack him!"

Diana rocked with silent laughter.

"I . . . I . . . feel just that way about Gerald," she murmured when she could speak. "I can't bear even Wrexborough to put a finger on him. But you must begin

to dress, darling, and so must I. I was so sorry not to be here to meet you, but I had to go in a horrid motor with some people."

"Well, Crysceïs . . . little girl of gold," said Owen, smiling down at her, as half an hour later she came and stood shyly before him, "are you pleased with yourself?"

"Do you like me?" she asked wistfully.

"If you didn't have on that diamond halo I would show how much I like you."

A sweet recklessness thrilled suddenly through Phoebe. She took a passionate little step toward him.

"Show me any way," she whispered.

Owen caught his lip in his teeth. His eyes darkened, and he stood silent, gazing at her. Then he put his hand over her heart, and felt it leap to his touch.

"Is it all mine?" he said in a low voice.

"All, all!" said the girl, still whispering, and straining up her whole slight figure to meet his hand. "Oh, if I could only take it out of my breast and show it to you!"

He caught her to him and set his lips to hers. The kiss was long and deep. He drew back from it with a shudder, putting his hand over his eyes.

Suddenly the noise of a huge silver gong went softly roaring through the house.

Owen tried to smile it off.

"Honey-pot . . . honey-pot," he said unsteadily. "This is a crazy way to prepare you for your introduction into English society. . . ."

Phoebe was looking up at him, a soft, dazed passion in her eyes.

"I don't care . . ." she whispered. "I don't care for anything in the whole world but your love."

"Well . . . you have it," said he with a short laugh. "Now, come. . . . Don't look at me like that. . . . Oh, what a disintegrating little witch you are! Come . . . really . . . we must go down. Let's say our multiplication table together to collect our wits." And he began so seriously: Twice one is two; twice two is four; that Phoebe laughed also, and the spell was broken.

The house party which Diana had asked to meet Phoebe and Owen consisted chiefly of her most intimate friends. Londoners, both wise and frivolous, especially at the end of the season, welcome anything that is new, and the romantic story well told of a little Cinderella, who was also,

Diana declared, a darling and a beauty—and who had just been lifted by the Prince from obscurity and poverty into the fairy-like possession of American millions ("billions," Lady Frances had put it), made all the guests at Mivvern anxious to see Cinderella for themselves.

It was a delightful gathering—as delightful and catholic as only English house parties ever are. There was an ex-cabinet minister—the most distinguished parliamentarian of his day—an amusedly listless personage, with dead-white hair and dead-black eyes, and a lank, languid figure—who looked as though Hamlet might have been his grandfather, the "melancholy Jacques" his father, and Amiel a maternal uncle.

There was an old cabinet minister, who looked exactly like the picture of John Bull in "Punch"—and a young cabinet minister,—a very stripling of a cabinet minister, with a smooth, round, peachy, teasing face, greenish-grey eyes and impossibly thick boyish hair. Phoebe could scarcely believe that the Honourable Victor Keith Hadringham really and truly occupied that awesome position.

There was a rather overpowering great lady of mature charms, with a petunia-coloured wig and the biggest sapphires in England, who Phoebe learned later to her unmixed bewilderment was the inamorata of the John-Bullish peer; openly acknowledged by everyone but herself and his lordship.

There came several less exalted personages—a great novelist, a well-known actor, a noted M.F.H., some charming women among whom was Lady Frances's sister Delia Torrance (called Dempsy by her friends), a gay mad-cap, as small and dark as Lady Frances was tall and fair.

"Nervous, dear?" asked Owen, as they went down the last broad, shallow flight together and the hum in the drawing-room grew louder.

"No," said Phoebe, with a little up-tilt of her chin. "It's funny how brave one feels in a beautiful dress. It's like a knight getting on his armour."

"Well, God be wi' you, little Daniel," said Owen, stepping aside for her to enter the brilliant room that hummed like a gilt hive. "I throw you to the lions. . . ."

XXIX

PHOEBE never forgot that first English dinner. Young Hadringham took her in. When they sat down Lord Rockmorton, a quiet, dark man of about thirty-five, was on her right. Phoebe's eyes were sloe-blue with shy excitement. The little blushes waved their bright flags beneath. On her sorrel head the tiny diamonds twinkled as she turned from one to the other of the two men, who both began talking to her at the same time.

"Talk to me, Mrs. Randolph," urged Hadringham; "Rockmorton is only 'bluffing,' as you say in the States. He isn't such fathoms deep as I am. He's really the property of Dempsey Torrance, only she talks so much and he so little that they've never managed to come to the point between them."

"Don't listen to Vic, Mrs. Randolph," said Rockmorton in his turn. "He's an abominable hedger and would compromise with Cupid himself."

"Oh," said Phoebe, delighted, as she thought, to understand this allusion. "I know. And are you a 'ditcher,' Lord Rockmorton?"

"I see you're thinking of the industries that flourished so amazingly among the Tories last year," answered he, smiling. "But I was only alluding to my friend's constitutional weakness. No—I'm not a 'ditcher.' The duke and our great man and Thrynne there represent the opposition. I'm what our papers so chastely call a 'Liberal peer.'"

"He's a Laodicean," said Hadringham. "He'd rather have to take old Sophia off Burlough's hands than give a casting vote."

"Why do you call her 'old Sophia'?" asked Phoebe, glancing at the Countess of Greystairs. "She isn't really old."

"We don't mean anything unkind by it," Hadringham assured her gravely. "It's a sort of term of affection. Perhaps it's a little the contrast of her wig. Did you ever see such immortal youth in a wig?"

"It would be more becoming with a little grey in it, don't you think so?" suggested Phoebe timidly.

Rockmorton and Hadringham went off into fits of laughter.

"Suggest it to her! Pray suggest it to her, dear lady," said Rockmorton when he had recovered. "And let me hide behind the door when you do so."

"Well, I do think it would soften her face," persisted Phoebe stoutly.

"'Soften her face!'" moaned Hadringham, and then they were off again.

"What did I say so funny that time?" asked Phoebe, with a puzzled smile.

"Why, bless me, Mrs. Randolph, if you softened old Sophia's face you'd destroy it entirely. Her only hope is to keep it as hard as possible."

"As *hard* . . . ?" said Phoebe, opening wide her eyes upon him.

"The 'patina' of Lady Greystairs's face is celebrated," Rockmorton explained. "It's almost as rare a work of art as the lost Chinese art of cloisonnée on filigree."

"Is it . . . *enamelled?*" asked Phoebe, in an awed whisper, which convulsed them again. "I've heard of that, but I never saw it before."

And she gazed cautiously over the épergne of mauve orchids, at the perilous snows and carnations of "old Sophia's" countenance.

"Eric," said Hadringham suddenly, "I've done my duty nobly by Lady Constance, but the fair Boultbee will make her Arthur call you out on the pretext that your hair isn't brushed to suit him, or something of that sort,—if you neglect her another instant."

Rockmorton put up his eye-glass, looked through it with scorn at his friend, as though saying, "I'm up to your tricks, old chap," and turned resignedly to the beauty on his right, who was beginning to make pellets of her bread with a frosty air of detachment.

"Now," said Hadringham genially to Phoebe, "tell me something about Virginia. I've always doted on Virginia and Virginians ever since I first read my Thackeray; and I'm sure you'd like talking about your home."

"Oh, how kind of you to care!" cried Phoebe, her eyes lighting up, "just like big purple lamps," as Hadringham afterwards confided to Diana. And she flung herself whole-heartedly into a description of Nelson's Gift, the darkies, "Killdee," "King Reddy"—everything.

"And you've lived there like a little dryad in a birch-tree all these years," said Victor Hadringham, regarding

her meditatively out of his broad, greenish eyes, "and now you sit here looking like a darling little queen in the midst of our over-civilised flummeries."

It was so astonishing to Phoebe to have a strange youth call her a "darling little queen," even though he were the infant prodigy of the Cabinet, that she blushed all down her milky neck and arms.

"Oh, you sweet!" thought Victor; "here I've been wasting my youth mulling at beastly politics when I might have been questing for you in the cotton groves of Virginia."

"Virginia *has* cotton groves, hasn't it?" he asked suddenly.

"Well . . . you see," said Phoebe, hesitating in her effort to impart the truth without seeming too bluntly to correct an ignorance so astonishing in a Cabinet Minister; "it doesn't grow quite tall enough to make groves. We say cotton fields. But South Carolina and Georgia and Alabama are the cotton States. Tobacco comes from Virginia, you know."

"Of course! Sir Walter Raleigh, his pipe! . . . And he brought us over those jolly flowers called Michaelmas-daisies, too. But, to tell you the truth, I'm not thinking of either the flora or the staple products of Virginia. What I am *really* thinking . . ."

"Yes? . . . What?" asked Phoebe, deeply interested.

"Since you ask me then—what I am really thinking is whether you are frightfully in love with your husband? . . . But stay . . . don't break it too abruptly to me if you are. I couldn't stand the shock like this, right before everyone, with a large slice of roast beef looking me full in the face, too. . . . But please, please don't say you are! . . . He's ages too old for you. You should love someone of—let me see—well, someone not more than thirty-two . . . someone who would be foolish enough to build a little shrine to each of those pansies that I suppose you call eyes. You angel lady!" he broke off, "if you look at me with that horrified expression of shocked amaze, I shall swoon, and then 'the Powers,'" he nodded towards Lord Burlough, "will want to know what's up, and my parliamentary future won't be worth twopence! *Are* you really shocked?" he asked, leaning a little nearer her, charmed by the puzzled cloud in her eyes, which arose from not knowing whether to consider him demented or a

wicked Lothario. "You mustn't be, you know? . . . Just ask Di, or any of them, and they'll tell you that Vie Hadringham is a perfectly harmless person."

"Oh," said Phoebe, immensely relieved. "Of course . . . you were 'chaffing' me, as you call it over here!"

"No,—lovely dryad, I wasn't exactly chaffing," said Hadringham mournfully. "But I'm afraid you *are* in love with your husband. Only don't tell me so bang out. Sweet dreams are better than sour realities."

Here Rockmorton firmly intervened, and Phoebe, bewildered and determining to ask the key of this strange statesman's character from Diana on the first opportunity, turned to her other neighbour with a little breath of relief.

It was an eager, excited Phoebe who faced Owen that night, when he came in from his dressing-room to ask how she had enjoyed her evening.

"Oh, Owen!" she cried. . . . "They seem to like me! . . . Oh, I'll make you proud of me yet! . . . You *shall* be proud of me! . . ."

"Conceited child! I'm proud of you now," said he, laughing. "Keep those Cinderella slippers still a moment, and tell me some of your triumphal experiences."

She came and sat on the arm of the big, chintz-covered chair into which he had thrown himself. Her voice took on a little hush.

"Owen . . . do you know? It was like miracles. . . . But I *didn't* make a fool of myself. When Mr. Ravon took me off to that corner it was all I could do not to look round to you for help. One of the greatest scholars in England, and *me,* Owen! Just think of it! . . . and then. . . ."

She swung her graceful body forward and looked into his face.

"Do you know what happened?"

"If I hadn't been looking all the while, I should strongly suspect him of having kissed you," replied he, much amazed.

"No. . . . But he began that quotation about the Dioscuri from Epictetus, and I *finished* it! . . . You know Epictetus is the *only* what-you-might-call learned book that I *do* know anything about! . . . I felt a dreadful little fraud, but he looked so pleased that I just thanked God I knew that much! . . . Then Lord Burlough said some-

thing about Burke, and I had read some of Burke to dear father, so I knew *that!* . . . And oh! Owen . . . won't you get me *all* Burke's speeches . . . and, and . . . Plato. And some things from the Persian. I do want to know things so dreadfully! I want you to be proud of me! Oh, I do want that more than anything!"

"More than *anything?*" he asked, laughing in spite of himself, and catching the excited little hand which was tracing on the air the immense scope of the learning which she wished to absorb.

She slid down beside him, regardless of her spangled gown.

"More than anything . . . but one thing," she said softly. Owen sat looking into the ardent, upturned face a moment; then he took it in his hands, and kissed softly her forehead and eyelids and mouth.

"Dear 'Honey-pot,'" he said. "It's after one. I'm going to help you get off these gew-gaws—unless you want America."

"No—I told her that she needn't wait up."

He helped her unfasten the circlet and roses, undid such hooks as she could not reach, and then, kissing her again in that gentle, almost melancholy way, it seemed to her, went off to his own room.

Phoebe, relieved as she always was at the continuance of his unimpassioned mood, felt yet a sharp, contradictory pang. Did he really, really love her, after all? or was it only a kind affection that he felt? She crept rather forlornly and humbly into the big bed, and in her ear, buried in the huge, square pillow, her heart beat. "Shameless! Shameless! Would he love you at all if . . . he knew?"

Great tears began to burn her eyes. All the guileless delight in her little triumphs slipped from her like a garment. She sobbed herself to sleep.

XXX

THE month of August, the most disastrous to agriculture that England had known in many years, passed weeping on its way. As a writer from Herefordshire summarised in one of the weeklies, "Wheat was nil, under water; barley practically ditto; oats worse than bad; grass 120, but no good."

"You will carry away a doleful impression of our 'tight little island,'" Diana had said to Phoebe on the fourth morning of steady downpour at Mivvern, but so very "nice" was everyone to the little Virginian that it would have taken more than a rainy August to give her a sad impression of England.

And yet in spite of all the petting and spoiling that she received, in spite of the wonderful and ever new fact that she was regarded as a "great darling" and the "new beauty" wherever she went, in spite of Owen's evident if amused pride in her little successes,—far down in her heart a red mouse was gnawing night and day. Scarcely was there a moment that she did not feel the sharp teeth digging, digging in her side. And dreadfully clear would sometimes come the face of Richard,—just as she was falling asleep or waking maybe,—with expressions of terrible intimacy,—with eyes dilated with cruel love, as she had seen it that night in May.

And she would wonder with a sick shudder, lying all alone in the big bed under its gay chintz curtains, how Owen's face would look were he ever to know, . . . Were she ever to tell him. . . . Would he perhaps kill her? Kill Richard? . . . Oh, she hoped that rather than hate her he would kill her quickly, mercifully! But she knew that this was mere idle fantasy. No idea could be more far-fetched and absurd than that Owen should deal brutally with a woman. No,—he would merely give her one look of loathing and turn from her forever. She tried to imagine his face with such a look upon it, but except in a dream now and then, horribly real, she could never picture it otherwise than kind. Yet this kindly look was, in itself, beginning to torture her. Had she then dreamed those few passionate caresses, that she trembled to remember, that she had trembled in receiving,—afraid of her own joy in them, that even now seemed so shameful a thing to her?

Even that kiss, given on the evening of their arrival at Mivvern, just before they went down to dinner, had been the last of its kind that she had received from him. And, in her ignorance of the ways of men, she asked herself, if it was like that perhaps always? Did intense feeling die with them as a bee dies when it has stung? . . . Was one passionate embrace all that their love demanded? And oh! when she so completely loathed that other, was it, after

all, so shameful in her to love passionately the man who was her husband? But, then, was it not doubly shameful to love him if he had no love for her? . . . If he only thought of her with that amused affection which she had come almost to shrink from? . . .

A wild hope had begun to visit her as far back as those Paris days. The hope that perhaps . . . in spite of everything, she had been mistaken. That destiny would not put upon her the hideous burden of that other's child. When she thought that this horror might be before her . . . it seemed as though she must escape through what the old Stoic that she loved,—her one wise friend, Epictetus,—called "the open door." . . . But she felt so well, so light . . . surely, surely she had been mistaken. Yet, if she were not . . . if that surplusage of misery were in store for her . . . would not even the harsh God of the Old Testament forgive her if she sought escape from it in death. For there had begun to grow in Phoebe a new realisation of the terrible wrong that she had done to Owen. She had known his views on certain matters when she consented to marry him . . . that his code was one of broadest compassion and non-judgment of others even for a fault like hers . . . but . . . his code involved the telling of the truth, . . . the deliberate choice of a man in such a case. . . . And what had she done by her silence? . . . It was no less than the one sin unpardonable in women that she had committed—the foisting of another man's child on one who would believe himself its father. . . . Oh, now . . . if this child were born to her she must tell him . . . she must tell him and go away from him forever or . . . It was too late to retrieve her sin against him, but at least she could expiate it even by death.

And she wondered at her own nature, which could pass through such abysms of wretchedness as she descended into, during these hours, . . . and then later on recoil and find solace and even joyousness in the passing moment.

If only, if only *that* would not come upon her, she could bear anything else, even the lack of a keener love on Owen's part. If only *that* would withdraw its sullen, fetid shadow from her life, . . . she would go softly all her days, not in the bitterness, but in the thankfulness of her heart. She could tell him then—some day—without absolute despair.

And in Owen also this hope had begun to stir. She

seemed so girlish, so Hebe-fresh and virginal, . . . her lithe figure had such pretty slenderness. Might it not all have been a horrible mistake? . . . The error of a girl's ignorant alarm, following the shock of betrayal? . . . If this were so . . . The rest seemed almost trivial compared to the unspeakable relief that would result from a certain knowledge that no child would be born of Richard's wanton baseness.

Owen looked on life with a large tolerance. Bodily chastity, *per se,* had always seemed to him far below other virtues in the scale of goodness. He ranked unselfishness, forgiveness, kindliness, fellow-feeling far above it, when considered as a thing apart. A merciful prostitute seemed to him a far worthier creature than a back-biting prude. He valued deeply that saying of the Christ that publicans and harlots enter the Kingdom before certain of the professedly righteous. He had not the Minotaurish trend of the male nature which demands offerings of virgins as its natural food. That Phoebe had not come to him a virgin was a matter that caused him personal suffering through the instinctive exclusiveness of sexual passion, but he did not condemn her or regard her as a soiled creature because in her unguarded, inexperienced springtime she had yielded to an overmastering if mistaken passion. For he, on his side, never doubted that Phoebe would one day tell him all. What racked him, what broke him on the wheel of his own imagination was the thought that in the fair body which had grown dearer to him than the blood in his own veins lay hidden that possible life with sources drawn from a foul spring, . . . the life quickened by another and which might bring her torture and even death.

Love, in its strongest aspects, is never a reasoned thing. Such love he had come to feel for her, yet he told himself that he had full reason also for his love.

A sweeter, more generous, more single-hearted, more natural and divinely ardent creature never drew the breath of life, he felt assured,—recalling the infinite sweet riches of her lovely nature. A fitter victim for Richard's cool-hearted lust could not have been found, though fate had combed the world with her great carding-iron. And yet . . . *how was it with her in regard to Richard?* She gave him, . . . Owen . . . a pathetic hero-worship; . . . a trembling affection (it had never occurred to him that Phoebe responded even by a tonic echo to his own passion),

the result in chief of what, she must tell herself, poor child, was her debt of guilty gratitude towards him. But Richard, . . . how did she think of him? . . . Was that love quite dead, or only sleeping? If she were to see him again, . . . when she saw him again, . . . for that ordeal must come to both of them, to her, and to Owen himself, in time, . . . when she saw Richard again, . . . *how would it be with her?* A first unhappy passion in the heart of a girl like Phoebe must be a saturating poison, he thought, infecting the tissues of soul and body, like some fabled potion, . . . like the fatal drink mixed by Isolde. Had life that bitterness in store for him? . . . that he should see in her eyes some day rekindled love for Richard?

Once he had held her against his heart as wife, . . . once only. For her own sake he had drunk of the cup that had not been mixed for him, . . . but out of that sole embrace had sprung an enduring passion, . . . that emotion begotten of spirit and of flesh which is experienced but once in a lifetime by man or woman.

And so, with the red mice of secret pain nibbling at their hearts, they went with the desperately weeping August days from country house to country house, and always Phoebe was petted and spoiled delightfully, and Owen amused and humanly pleased with her pretty triumph and his part in it.

On the night that Diana gave her fancy ball at Guant's Hill the weather stopped sobbing and weeping for a little while, and by twelve o'clock a great gold-breasted moon lolled on feathery clouds behind the oaks and beeches of the park.

That was the crowning night of Phoebe's comet-like passage through the firmament of British country life. Diana had invented for her a lovely dryad's costume, and when dressed in it she looked as though a slender birch had just opened its silver house to let her forth.

Drifting by with Diana in a pause of the dancing, she hesitated a moment, then stopped shyly near Owen, who was leaning against a doorway in his Cossack costume of severe black cloth and high astrachan cap. This costume had been suggested by Tolstoy's novel read on the passage over.

". . . . Will you dance with me, Sir Cossack?" she asked, flushing and paling in her wild-rose way.

Owen smiled and shook his head.

"Bad form, sweet dryad," he said. "Diana would have me flogged with my own knout."

"But . . . *we* don't mind, do we?" she asked wistfully. "I'd so love to dance with you just once!"

He shook his head again, still smiling.

Diana, turning back, overheard.

"What's this! Waltz with one's own husband at *my* ball! Never!" cried she, and bore the mutinous dryad to the other end of the room.

Somehow Owen's refusal to dance with her stung Phoebe out of all proportion to what, in her mood that night, she felt to be its affront. And this sharp sting in her pride, in the vanity evoked by the constant spoiling that she had been receiving of late, . . . caused her to sting herself also like a little snake of Arizona, ringed by birds with thorns. Sharply she planted these self-inflicted wounds in her sore, morbid pride. "He snubs me kindly like that, because I bore him. He doesn't want me. He is only fond of me as if I were some little pet. Something that he had found hurt or sick . . . that he had taken pity on. Yet other men care for me . . . make love to me. And if I am shameless to want his love is it my fault? Did I make myself? No, . . . some cruel power made me what I am. The cruel power has made me love him. These others love me, but I only love him. And he doesn't want me. Even to dance with me would bore him. And yet other men tell me that they love me, and that I am made for love."

And in her over-strung, excited mood tonight, that grew ever more and more excited as the gorgeous, confusing pageant surged about her, she began to feel angrily that life was again trying to cheat her, was playing with her like a cat with a mouse. If he did not mean to love her more, why had he loved her so passionately that once? If her love meant nothing to him, why that one time had he trembled at the touch of her mouth on his? . . . But she was not a toy, a doll, to be picked up in a careless moment and then laid aside and forgotten. She was not even a little girl any more, to be soothed with sugar plums of kindly words, and as good as bidden to go and play by herself. No . . . she would *make* him feel . . . she would *make* him love her! But how she would do this, . . . by what means she could not tell. Only her heart burned

sullenly like a smoky candle in her sore, angry breast, and its fumes rose to her brain, confusing, clouding it with thoughts half conceived, that swarmed sparkling like the fiery patterns on a darkness which is not dark to sick eyes.

And this mood mounted, and mounted with every dance, with every sip of champagne which she drank thoughtlessly to quench the thirst of dancing, with every word of flattery or love, whispered by men who were, some in earnest, and some only grasping at the chance of a few hot, thrilling moments of by-the-way pleasure when, in some discreet corner, they might taste that red, tempting, alien mouth. The unreasoning recklessness of fever came upon her. Her hands were hot and dry, . . . her eyelids felt hot against her eyes, so feverishly glittering and dilated. When she saw the tall figure in its Cossack dress, dancing with some other woman, vain rage scorched her heart, and she felt as the humming-bird does when it tears to pieces the flower that refuses honey. He was hers . . . he was hers. . . . Whether he cared or not . . . no matter how wrong it was for her to care, . . . he was hers, her own. And once she had been his. But he had played with her. What for her had been a torture of sweetness and was now a torture of anguish . . . had for him been only the careless drinking from a cup that stood at his hand. And now that he had emptied the cup of novelty, . . . he pushed it aside. Yes, yes! She was like an empty cup to him, . . . but she would show him that she was more . . . that to the very brim she was filled with the wine of life, . . . of love. . . .

As she finished a dance with Rockmorton they found themselves near the door of one of a suite of smaller rooms, that lay opposite the ball-room. A knot of people clustered about this door, evidently gazing at something of interest which was taking place within. She pressed forward, eager in her present feverish mood to escape nothing of the "lust of the eyes." She found herself next to Owen. She glanced up at him, but he did not see her. His look was fixed on Dempsy Torrance, who was dancing alone in the centre of the room. And, all stung and quivering with jealousy, she hurt herself again and again by gazing unnoticed at that look of admiration in his eyes. And again and again, smarting, on fire with her piteous, helpless jealousy, . . . she glanced from his eyes to the light, madcap figure of Dempsy, swaying and turning in an East Indian dance.

She was famous for her mimicry of celebrated dancers, and now she was giving them an imitation of the last London favourite in a dance of exotic seduction.

"I could do that better,—yes, better than she can!" came Phoebe's passionate thoughts, like a swarm of sparks burning and dying out as they burnt. "I am prettier than she is—I have prettier hands and feet." And she clenched her little hands in the folds of her dress and, gazing at Owen, kept saying between her teeth: "Look at me . . . look at me . . . you *shall* look at me."

He turned suddenly and looked down full into her eyes. She gasped, locking her hands together. Something in her small, excited face struck him painfully.

"Don't you feel well, dear?" he said.

"Yes—perfectly. Why do you stare at her so?"

"At whom? At Miss Torrance? . . . Because she's charming to stare at. You can't see her where you are. Take my place."

He stepped aside to make room for her, but she caught his arm in her strong little hand.

"Come and dance with *me*," she said under her breath. "I don't care what anyone thinks,—not Diana or anyone. . . . Come and dance with me, Owen."

He laughed, shrugged his shoulders and gave her his arm. They began to dance. He held her lightly as one holds a stem of flowers which one is afraid of crushing. In the middle of the ball-room she stopped short.

"I won't bore you any more," she said.

"Why, Phoebe!" said Owen, quite disconcerted and glancing sideways at her stormy face. "What is the matter, dear?"

"Life is the matter . . . " she said in a low, condensed voice. Before he could make any response to this Victor Hadringham had danced off with her.

Owen stood an instant looking after them. He felt worried. The child had never looked lovelier, but there was something unnatural and overwrought in her expression. She did not look exactly ill,—more what the Scotch call "fey." Then he saw her smiling and chattering in the hall outside with Hadringham, and presently a footman brought two glasses of champagne. She drank one nearly at a draught. Hadringham just touched the other to his lips. They went off towards the conservatories together.

A half-hour later Owen saw her standing near one of the great windows with Lord Bemyss, and went up to her.

"Don't overtire yourself, dear," he said. "It's nearly three o'clock. And, by the way, I wouldn't take too much of this champagne if I were you. Wrexborough is more famous for his claret than his 'fizz,' eh, Tony?"

"Rotten stuff," agreed Bemyss. "I've told him so often, and so has Diana, but he's awfully pig-headed."

Owen scarcely heard what he said, however, being too astounded at the expression with which Phoebe was regarding him. She was playing with the trail of ivy on her breast, and a slight smile just lifted the edge of her lip. In her eyes, steady, dilated and wide, fixed on his, was a look almost of menace. Bemyss had turned away to speak to someone for an instant.

"If you think I'm taking too much wine, why don't you tell me so straight out?" Phoebe was asking in a low voice that only he could hear, "why do you put it on the poor Duke's champagne?"

"Why, *Phoebe!*" said Owen, for the second time that evening.

Here Bemyss turned back to them again, and Owen, after hesitating a moment, went off without saying a word.

The cruel little imp in Phoebe's heart danced with glee.

"I've hurt him . . . I've hurt him! . . . Then I *can* hurt him! . . . Oh, I'll hurt him more!" she kept saying to herself.

When she ran up to the beautiful apartments that Diana had assigned to her in the West Tower it was after four o'clock. Somehow her feet would not go quietly that night —she might have been shod with the little red shoes of the sea maid in the fairy-tale,—the little red shoes that made their wearer's feet dance ever on and on though her heart was breaking. Her feverish mood had passed into physical fever now, though she did not know it. Her brain was spinning. Her thoughts came without sequence but always on the same subject. "Love . . . love. . . . He shall love me. . . . Life *shall* not cheat me. Love . . . love . . . passionate love . . . the love in story-books and songs and poems. Yes . . . that is what I want. I'm made for love, they say. I want it . . . I need it . . . I will have it. . . . "

Her eyes were black and quivering. The two little blushes under them were like flowers of fire now.

She looked about her. Owen was not there,—but she had felt him follow her upstairs. He was in his own room. He would come presently to help her unfasten her dryad-dress. She took a length of her lovely hair in either hand, and, running over to the great mirror sunk in the wall between two silver lamps, stood gazing at her own image.

Through the big casement window the moon, now near its setting, diapered her filmy gown with soft rose and gold and amethyst.

She turned, slowly swaying from side to side, as Dempsy had done in the East Indian dance. "Yes . . . yes . . . I am far prettier . . . my breasts are like white flowers . . . hers are like little, withered pears. . . . "

She laughed softly, a cruel, low laugh. . . .

"Well, little dryad," said Owen's cool, kind voice from the doorway of the other room. He came lounging in with a cigarette in his hand. He still wore his Cossack dress, but had laid aside the hot cap of astrachan. As he caught sight of her he stopped short. The child was so wonderfully lovely, standing there in the mingled light of moon and silver lamps, with her bright hair dripping from her fingers, and her double shining back from the pool of the big mirror. As he stood, the cigarette-smoke curling up between them, she turned softly and came nearer, laughing again that little, honeyed cruel laugh. And she began swaying and bending before him, in the fashion of Dempsy's slightly tipsy dance of an hour ago,—only here the willowy beauty of the slight figure made all the difference.

"See!" she whispered. "I can do it too. . . . Don't I do it as well as she does?"

Owen caught his lip between his teeth. She knew that trick of his, and her heart leaped.

She came nearer.

"Tell me . . . tell me . . . " she whispered. "Isn't this as pretty as what she did?"

"Phoebe . . . " began Owen. His voice sounded strange and he stopped short.

"Tell me . . . tell me . . . " she coaxed, still nearer now. The warm perfume of her hair stole to him. Suddenly he took a step forward and buried his face in its thick fragrance. She could feel him shaking. With that soft, low laughter she pushed him from her.

"No . . . no . . . I want you to look at me. I want

you to tell me that I can do it as well as she can. Look . . . look. . . . "

Slowly she swayed and turned, allurement in every line of her softly laughing face and lissome body. In that thin, classic gown, with the ivy leaves on hair and breast, she was like a little priestess of Idalia offering herself to love. . . . And surely that was love,—passionate love that poured on him from her eyes so dilated and feverish in her tense, ardent face. Desire shook him. He went white as death.

Then suddenly, in the midst of those soft, voluptuous wreathings, she stiffened—stopped short. Her hand went to her side—clutched it. Wild, amazed terror stared from her changed eyes.

"What is it? For God's sake. *What is it?*" he cried, starting forward, the spell snapped.

She rocked stiffly against him like a broken toy. He saw that she had fainted. He laid her on the great Elizabethan bed, and ran wildly in search of help.

She had felt another life move beneath her heart.

XXXI

THE little village of Wyckthorn in Norfolk looked much the same as it had done in the time of Joseph Arch, the farmers no longer flogged the farm lads,—neither were folk horsewhipped for stealing turnips, nor did laborers get the sack for not attending church as in the good old days before 1870; and though the cottages had been enlarged, so that families of nine were no longer sometimes forced to sleep in two rooms, thus increasing the danger of "a heavy fall of bastards in one year," as an old woman had once complained,—the roses still climbed as lavishly over them, and their little windows peeped as charmingly as ever from under eyebrows of tangled creepers.

"Wyckthorn Cottage," as the house they had taken was called, stood apart at one end of the village, surrounded by gardens and pasture-lands. One approached the front door through an old paling fence, in which between brick posts was set a little gate of beautifully wrought iron. The old sunk-garden lay at the back, and when Phoebe and Owen came down about the first of September it was all vaporous with the tall mauve sprays of

lavender, through which here and there broke a fiery spike of scarlet sage. Beyond the garden lay a shaven lawn, divided from the fields by a ha-ha. The house had been added to from time to time, and had that familiar charm of things that have grown, not been turned out all at once in a lump of geometrical precision.

It had the queer internal economy of such houses, where all the domestic viscera, so to speak, seem topsy-turvy, yet work in perfect harmony as though defying the natural laws of architecture. Thus the library was at the front door, the hall wound like a "Z"—the dining-room found itself in a wing, and the drawing-room came last of all, spreading out along the whole front of the garden as though the old house had said, "I will express my feelings for once in a big yawn and stretch,"—and so had gaped forth this delightful, commodious apartment, full of old Sheraton furniture and flowery chintz that seemed to reproduce the garden within doors.

The sea lay about three quarters of a mile off, and a winding, white road led to it along the "Broads," on an arm of which a windmill spread its slatted wings against the low, English sky.

Phoebe had been very ill for several days after those wild moments in the East Tower, in which she had seemed to change into another being before Owen's bewildered eyes.

As he sat white and miserable the next morning near the window before which her wilful, lovely dance had taken place, Diana had come slipping softly in from the bedroom, a queer smile on her lips.

This smile was so strange that it checked the question with which Owen had started up.

"You dear soul," she had whispered. "Don't look so scared."

She took his hand, and held it.

"You dear, stupid, stupid old silly!" she had exclaimed, still in a whisper and still smiling. "Haven't you guessed? . . . Really?"

The blood rushed back on Owen's heart.

"Not . . .?" he stammered.

"Yes!" said Diana. Tears shone behind her smile. "The poor darling is a bit out of her head,—but it's nothing. Girls are often like this . . . with the first, you know. I'm going now to wire Fulke to come down at

once. There's a good nurse in Wrexton. I'll send a trap for her when I send the wire. . . . The child got over-excited last night. . . . Danced too much, and all that. *Don't* look so worried! I assure you it's nothing. She'll be perfectly all right in a day or two."

And, still smiling that mysterious little smile that women have for such occasions, she left him.

So it had come! . . . He sat down with a queer feeling of halvedness, as though he had been cut in two just under his breast-bone. And, then, suddenly broke upon him a dark shower of strangely practical questionings. When would the child be born? . . . He remembered bits of old-wives' wisdom that he had not known until then he was even aware of. From some odd pigeon-hole in his mind he drew them forth. Seven-months children were different from other children. People who knew about such things could tell at once. . . . He must keep anyone away from her who knew the date of their marriage. . . . Tante Suzanne. . . . She would be sure to want to be with Phoebe. . . . If the child were not what a seven-months child should be—she would know at once. Would surmise all sorts of things. . . . His heart choked him with its hot bound. . . . She would think that he—*he*—Owen himself. . . . He walked up and down the room with a face like death. Suddenly it worked like a woman's. He sat down again and covered it with his hands. A sob broke from him.

Nothing that he had ever heard or read of,—no tragedy of Ophelia, or Antigone or Virginia herself, slain in the market-place by her father's hand,—seemed to him so piteous, so horrible, as the tragedy of that dance of love checked by the stirring of another's child. For he guessed with hateful certainty that such was the truth.

Phoebe came out of her illness like one dazed. She seemed unable to recall incidents that had happened for quite a considerable period before it. Thus her arrival at Gaunt's Hill and the ball itself were blanks to her. Diana petted her and bade her not worry;—told her that it was all very natural just now, and that the great accoucheur, Lindsay Fulke, had said that she only needed perfect quiet to set her straight again. It was that silly ball, and her own too charming little self, which had made those greedy men dance her to death,—that had done the mischief. If only she, Diana, had known! . . .

But, then, probably such a blessed little goosie as Phoebe had not known herself. Diana was *so* happy for her! . . . There was nothing in the world sweeter than little lips at one's breast. It was a droll, queer rapture that only those who had felt it would understand. Phoebe must think of her when that little sucking caress as of a fairy-bee thrilled her heart for the first time. And so on, and on. While Phoebe, lying white and spent, thought how strange it was that a lovely voice like Diana's could yet sound so hideous in her ears.

As soon as Phoebe was able to travel, Dr. Fulke ordered her to the quiet of Wyckthorn. Diana had a round of important visits to make in Scotland, and politics were very stirring just then, Wrexborough needed her every minute, but as soon as she could, as soon as Fulke would let her, she was coming to see how her little Virginian sweetie fared in an English cottage. It was a duck of a cottage. She envied her brother every time she went there. She wouldn't give one such ducky cottage for a dozen Gaunt's Hills, etc., etc.

Owen had realised almost immediately that Phoebe's mind was washed of the memory of that wayward, passionate danee, and he thanked God for it. He quivered when he remembered the depths of joyous passion, pagan and unashamed, that had been revealed in her. He had thought to marry Chloe, sweet as clover, and he had taken Idalia's daughter to his wife. And though it was a temporary madness that had thus unveiled the divine fire to him, yet he felt, very surely now, that love for him had kindled it, and that what had passed between her and Richard was but as lightning striking out a sudden storm, as soon spent as gathered.

Only the more terrible did this make the tragedy of the not-to-be-escaped fate that lay before her,—before him through her.

The first days at Wyckthorn were passed, whenever the weather permitted, in the Una-boat. As Phoebe had said, she never suffered from seasickness, and these long hours tacking along the lovely, wistful shore at high tide seemed to soothe her, and melt the trouble in her large eyes, for the time being.

Later on she began to ask for books and papers, and would lie contented on a sofa before the log-fire in the cheery drawing-room as long as Owen could manage to

read aloud to her. Somehow an obsession for hearing Plato took her,—and Owen subscribed to the London Library that he might easily get her any book that she desired.

He read the "Phedrus" and "Crito" and "Symposium" to her, and she thrilled over them as most girls of her age would have done over melodrama. Here was a new charm in this rich nature which he realised was only just beginning to unfold.

She gave a little laugh, the first in many a day, when he read how Alcibiades had taken the big wreath of violets and ivy, fluttering with ribbons, from his own brows and crowned Agathon, and then, suddenly catching sight of Socrates next him, had begged back some ribbons from Agathon and decked the great philosopher's bald head with them.

"Oh, Owen, I can *see* him!" she said. "So drunk and handsome, with Socrates' kind, ugly face just quietly smiling at him. But read me about Diotima again. What she says when Socrates asks her, 'What is love'?"

Owen read:

"'What, then, is Love,' I asked? 'Is he mortal? . . .' 'No.' 'What then?' 'As in former instances he is neither mortal nor immortal, but in a mean between the two.' 'What is he, Diotima?' 'He is a great spirit, and like all spirits he is intermediate between the divine and the mortal.' 'And what,' I said, 'is his power?' 'He interprets,' she replied, 'between gods and men. . . . '"

"Stop!" she had cried, raising herself on her elbow, with starry eyes and flushed cheeks. "That is enough. Put a mark in it—I want to learn it by heart tonight before I go to sleep."

Then she began to want to know more of the world philosophies and religions.

He got the Bhagavad Gita and a little book of extracts from the gospel of Buddha. From a beautiful translation of bits of the Mahabbarata he read her of how the king turns back from the door of heaven when the doorkeeper will not admit the faithful hound that has followed him through all his troubles. And of how, as he is turning away, lo! the doorkeeper himself is revealed as the great god Indra, who bids them both enter, as this was the last test.

Her tears came. She said:

"I think that's almost the loveliest thing in any Bible I ever heard of."

Owen bent down and kissed her with emotion. "*You* are the loveliest thing in or out of Bibles!" he had whispered rather chokily.

They made little excursions into Fichte, Spinoza, William Law. He sent for such books at random as they came into his mind. Then she wanted to know more of modern philosophy. He was astounded at her remarks on pragmatism.

"I don't think cutting up truth into lots of little bits makes it more true," she had said. "It doesn't seem *as* true, somehow. It's just as if one took a flower and pulled it apart, and then held it out and said, 'Here is a flower.' But it isn't a flower any more. It's just scraps. That is what . . . pragmatism, do you call it?—seems to do. Of course I'm only an ignorant girl, but it *seems* like that to me, Owen."

"It seems like that to one not ignorant at all," he answered, looking at her with a throb of tender pride. "A very great man has said much the same thing, only not in your pretty way." And he got Eucken's "The Truth of Religion" and read her parts of it that he thought would appeal to her, feeling that it would cost her too great an effort just then to follow through the heavy form of the whole.

At one passage her hand stole out and sought his timidly.

"Read that again," she whispered. And steadying his voice by an effort he did as she asked and repeated the words of splendid hope:

"An ascent of life may often result more easily from a precipitous fall with its scars than from the stagnation of daily routine. Evil may exercise a stirring power, and, along with this, point out the path to goodness. Suffering and guilt may occasionally be conducive to the inner advance of life and to the formation of a new nature."

This, together with his saying that "we cannot explain evil, but we can overcome it," she stored away in the armoury of wise words that she was furnishing as a defence against those dreadful thoughts that came like things out of the night and dragged her down into black places.

Among other things, he hunted up a book little read nowadays that he was fond of——Sir Humphry Davy's

"The Last Days of a Philosopher," and bade her note how strangely it presaged the Oriental dreams that had haunted London for the past twenty years or so. And then he read her Kant on "The Immortality of the Soul," to show her how a great mind differentiates between ratiocination and intuition.

She said very wistfully one night, after one of these ventures into philosophical speculation:

"Owen, dear,—I've just had a thought of my own. It's a very little thought, but it's all my own. I'd like to tell you, only I'm half ashamed."

He took her hand and held it to his cheek.

"Not of me, sweetheart, surely."

"Well, then . . . All these men, great and wise as they were, could not have imagined a new colour if they had tried ever so hard. How, then, could they have thought that they could imagine God?—Do you see what I'm trying to say?"

He looked wonderingly at her.

"That is not a little thought, darling. Yes . . . I see what you mean."

"It seems to me," she said, her eyes absent, "that to love what is beautiful and hate what is ugly—in life, and ourselves, and others . . . and never to judge. . . . It seems to me that is a good religion. . . ."

"So it is, sweetheart."

"A God that we could understand wouldn't be a God,—He would be no greater than those who understood Him. That is the way I feel. I think we just have to trust what is beautiful—and ask it to bless our sins to us."

Looking up rather timidly to see whether he approved her humble gropings, she surprised his eyes with tears in them.

"Oh . . . are you sad?" she cried, her voice tender and fallen.

"No. It's just that I love you very dearly. Very, very dearly, little heart."

She caught his hand with the book in it, and kissed it in that sudden way she had.

"If you love me I can bear anything!" she said, and he had answered:

"'If I love you!'" . . .

For lighter reading they had the enchanted forest of George Meredith to wander through, and he read her

some of the poets most dear to him. She especially loved the beautiful lines by Donne:—"The Undertaking." Over and over she made him read it to her:—

* * * * * *

"But he who loveliness within
Hath found all outward loathes,
For he who colour loves, and skin,
Loves but their oldest clothes.

If, as I have, you also do
Virtue in woman see,
And dare love that, and say so, too,
And forget the He and She.

And if this love, though placed so,
From profane men you hide,
Which will no faith on this bestow,
Or, if they do, deride:

Then you have done a braver thing
Than all the Worthies did:
And a braver thence shall spring,
Which is, to keep this hid."

When he had finished reading it for the first time, looking up to see from her expression whether it appealed to her, he had found her face covered by her hands.

"What is it, darling?" he had asked.

And suddenly she had uncovered her face, all quickened and uplifted.

"Oh, I will make myself all glorious within for you, like the King's daughter!" she had whispered passionately.

As often happens with the advent of a dreaded thing,—the transmutation of apprehension into reality brought with it a species of strange peace. The terrible, unavoidable destiny had fallen,—they were in the net. What use of further struggles?

Sometimes, when Owen thought of what the next six months must surely bring, his very flesh quailed, and, as for Phoebe, she was only able to sustain that dreadful imagination by the hope that it might result in death. In the meantime this beautiful present took on a wonderful glamour, as though in defiance of the dark shade that menaced at the crossways. She resigned herself to what lay before her, being convinced now, as women often

are, that she would die in childbirth, and having resolved to confess all before she died and thus fall quietly asleep with his forgiveness for pillow—since surely death would bring her his forgiveness.

A certain hateful problem Owen had had to solve alone. The problem of shielding Phoebe from any breath of scandal in regard to the premature birth of the child that would be looked upon as his.

After days and nights of racking thought he had decided to go to Dr. Fulke with a well-ordered lie. There was no other solution possible that he could see, try as he might, and by thus taking the experienced physician into what would be apparently a grave and intimate confidence he could command the protection for Phoebe which could be obtained in no other way.

So he confided to Fulke that, owing to serious family complications, he and his wife had been married privately at a date which antedated their public marriage by two months. Afterward events had occurred which made it necessary to confess all to Mrs. Randolph's father. He had insisted that no one else he told and on the immediate performance of a public wedding. Therefore, Dr. Fulke would understand the grave difficulty in which they found themselves at present.

Whether the great accoucheur credited this story or not Owen could never decide. He listened with discreet attention, saying, "Quite so, quite so," at proper intervals, and, when Owen had ended, assured him of the honour that he felt so grave a confidence to be.

"Give yourself no further uneasiness," he had then continued. "A word from me will keep Mrs. Randolph isolated from even her most intimate friends until such time as I may think fit. The Duchess tells me that she will be in Italy with her children during February and March. Have you any near relative on this side,—persons who may think it their privilege to be near Mrs. Randolph at such a time?—The confinement, as I said, will probably take place during the latter part of February."

When bald medical terms struck Owen on the raw he winced, but there was nothing for it but to sustain the interview to the bitter end. As long as he lived the thought of that stuffy, pompous house in Harley Street, of Fulke's sagacious, slightly over-ingratiating face and fluent, sonorous voice filled him with sick disgust and

mortification. He had never before deliberately fabricated and carried out a lie. Had the physician believed him as on proofs of Holy Writ,—still that stinging, mortifying doubt would have haunted him.

He left finally, having been told by Fulke that the confinement could be stated to have taken place prematurely, and that he (Fulke) would pronounce the condition of Mrs. Randolph to be so grave that no one must see her until his authority had been given.

"Let us see," he meditated finally. "A seven-months child, that would make it . . . Quite so. . . . In two months, not before,—friends might be permitted to see mother and babe. Give yourself no further uneasiness, Mr. Randolph. I will take matters firmly in hand when that . . . a . . . happy occasion arrives."

And with a smile meant to be sympathetic, but which resembled that of a genial clergyman relating an anecdote slightly off-colour to a carefully selected audience of one, the great man had bowed him out.

The people who had really grown fond of little Phoebe wrote her charming notes and letters in her exile. Diana, of course, but Dempsy Torrance also,—Lady Francie, Hadringham, Rockmorton, all sent her more or less scrappy but affectionate missives.

Hadringham's were written with a quill pen, almost two words to a page, and illustrated with clever caricatures of the powers that be. There was one, especially droll, of himself speaking in Midlothian to a solitary Scot, with the "ghaist of guid auld Wullie" (thus Phoebe learned that some of his old constituents alluded to the late Mr. Gladstone)—with this august shade weeping tears of wrath behind him, as the crowd rushed off after a blighting representation of the Duke of Wrexborough, in a monthly nurse's cap, with the tariff-reform in swaddling-bands held to his dueal chest. Diana wrote in high feather.

". . . I shall be running down to see you soon now, darling. We've scored the most glorious victory in Midlothian. That constituency has never returned a Tory since Gladstone won it from Buccleugh, you know." (As if Phoebe knew anything whatever of the kind!) "Wrexborough is simply chortling with glee. He says we can certainly force a dissolution of Parliament in November, now. But I don't know. The Liberals have some disgustingly strong men. Vic Hadringham made a ripping

speech in Dundee. But all this is just 'piffle' to you, dear duckie, isn't it? *I* know what *you're* interested in! —Mind it's to be 'Phoebe Diana' in case . . . !" And so on and on. . . .

"Oh, dear," Phoebe had exclaimed with some mournfulness after Owen had explained to her the meaning of Hadringham's sketch and Diana's political allusions. "If we're going to be here some time, I *must* learn *something* about it all. They're always talking this sort of way, and I feel such a little fool. . . ."

So Owen subscribed to "The Times," and "The Nation," as representing different sides of the shield. And Phoebe ploughed through Parliamentary debates and Liberal and Tory leaders with indefatigable if confused perseverance. The ideas which she gained from this enforced diet were not clear, but they were certainly enlarged!

By the same post that brought Diana's letter came one from Mary to Owen that fortunately he began to read while Phoebe was absorbed in her own news.

It was headed "Read this when alone,"—and he slipped it quietly into his pocket. He would say that he had mislaid it, if necessary, should Phoebe, who had noticed the handwriting, ask to see it later.

When he had an opportunity of reading it he found that Mary was at World's-End with Sally, who had been seriously ill.

"I know you don't like bad news in broken doses, dear Owen," Mary wrote. "So I will tell you at once that Dr. Patton says poor Sally has a grave heart-trouble. She will be subject to these attacks all her life, and must be very, very careful. She may live many years; she might go suddenly. He has told her frankly that her heart is involved, so that she will be careful and follow his instructions, but of course we haven't let her know *how* seriously. I've thought that the poor dear looked very badly for a long time. Of course it depresses her dreadfully, and Richard's being away makes it all much worse. He's in Ceylon now. I didn't dream he'd 'stick it out' so long. I've written him of Sally's condition and hope he'll be here before long. Sally never shows me his letters,—but they're written on very thin paper and—very little of it! This hurts her, of course. I can see it, though she never hints at such a thing. Dear Owen,—don't mind if I say something straight out of my heart

to you. But if you could write Sally an old-time-y, affectionate letter, I think it would do her more good than all Dr. Patton's heart-tonics put together. She hasn't shown me your letters, either, but—I know how she behaved at the time of your marriage,—poor, dear, wrong-headed, hot-tempered Sally.—And I know *you*—at least I think I do. —You just get cool when you're angry,—and it's so much harder to bear than any other form of wrath. I know as if I'd read every word just the sort of pleasant, 'apart' letters you write to Sally. But if you could see her now —there's something about her that's horribly pathetic—like that poor, dull, droopy eagle in Central Park that we've felt such righteous indignation over,—don't you remember?

"Well, then,—write to poor, moping, caged-eagle Sally as if you still loved her,—for I know you do, under all your vexation,—which is *so* natural! Even now, when I know how ill she is,—she gets my own tolerable little temper on its hind legs sometimes. But she'd really go straight to your heart if you could see her. I don't know a *lonelier* soul in the world than hers. Even I, whom she's so fond of, seem only to reach her through a medium like thick, clear glass. You have been nearer to her than anyone else, I think, so don't leave her to eat that sick heart of hers in isolation."

As Owen read these words a warm breath from the garden of childhood stole over him. How often Sally had forgiven him, and he her, in those old days!—Memory writes with strange invisible ink. The acid of anger gets only on its unlovely records, setting them sharp and black against the page; but pity brings forth kindly, tender phrases,—poignant trivialities of affectionate forbearance and unselfishness.

Before he went to bed that night he wrote his sister a long, affectionate letter full of their news (all except that of Phoebe's condition) and the gossip of people in high places, which he knew amused.

XXXII

TOWARDS the middle of February they left Wyckthorn and went to the pleasant lodgings that he had furnished in Half-Moon Street.

The day on which Phoebe's child was born was one of those London days of greyish-yellow fog through which the sun glowers like a great cat's eye.

As if to cheer the weather and the occasion, the maid had lighted so hot a fire in the dining-room that Owen, sitting down alone to a meal that had the tastelessness of food in dreams, was compelled to have the windows opened. The saffron murk streamed in through them like smoke, and that dense, penetrating smell of soot which clings even in foreign lands to books and stuffs that come from London filled his throat and nostrils.

Doctor Fulke had just been 'phoned for by Nurse King. No, Mrs. Randolph was not suffering. . . . All was going on very well. Nurse Stebbins would arrive with the doctor in half an hour. Mr. Randolph could go in now and speak to Mrs. Randolph if he wished.

He went with a painfully tightened heart.

Phoebe was propped up against the pillows, her eyes very fixed and bright, a little moth's-wing of dry, vivid colour close beneath them. She smiled when she saw him, and as he bent over and took her hand, timidly, said:

"Don't worry. . . . I'm not afraid."

And she kept saying "I'm not afraid. . . . I'm not afraid," until Nurse King made him a sign with her eyebrows to leave the room.

Owen went back to the dining-room, but the butler was there clearing away the breakfast things, so he took refuge in the little room, fitted up half as library, half as boudoir for Phoebe, where he was used to read aloud to her while she rested on the big lounge. Tcherkoff's play, "The Cherry Garden," lay face down on one of the cushions, where he had placed it when she went to bed the night before. He took it up and began mechanically reading where they had left off; one of the old, obvious questions that haunt such moments beating in his mind: Shall we ever finish it together?—He let the book drop, and, sitting down on the lounge, buried his face in the cushions. They smelt of the lavender water that she used on her hair, and he sprang up again and began to walk the room.

He had read a hundred times of men in his position, yet it seemed to him that the greatest efforts of genius to express what he was now feeling had been only clever literature. Yet they were dreadful enough in all conscience—and he recalled with a shudder the account in

"War and Peace" of the little princess's death in child-birth. Levin's distracted torment over Kitty in like case also came back to him. He shuddered as he thought that he might have to listen to dreadful cries later on,—cries wrung by an anguish which neither he nor any other being could stay. It was the brutal inevitableness of the thing which seemed to him most crushing. He remembered with another shudder what Fulke himself had said to him only a day or two ago,—by way of consolation he realised with a wry smile,—namely, that were the pains of child-birth pathological instead of natural scarcely a woman would survive.

He went to the window and looked out. No sign of Fulke's motor as yet. . . . Was that a cry? . . . He stopped short, his breathing checked. Ah, it was only Nurse King calling for America to bring hot water.

He and the doctor had decided that there would be no danger in America's remaining with her mistress. She was a young, unmarried woman with a straight record,—(Aunt Patty and Uncle Burrell had taught her chastity "with briers," so to speak)—and very ignorant of all facts, scientific or otherwise, connected with such matters as the one in progress today. She was badly frightened now, but such was her devotion to Phoebe that she would not for worlds have been anywhere but near her at such a time. With droll pathos she had stuffed her black ears already with cotton-wool so that, in case her "sweet sugar-lady" cried out, she should not hear it.

It seemed hours to Owen before Fulke came.

He remained in Phoebe's room about half an hour, then came out, followed by the second nurse, a dumpy, sweet-looking soul of about fifty, with a slight cast in her mild brown eyes, and slim, energetic hands. She was really the nurse in charge. Diana had wanted to send a woman, her own old nurse, who always looked after her in addition to professional nurses at such times, but Dr. Fulke had said that in this case he preferred that Nurse Stebbins should take charge.

——Owen waited until she had returned to Phoebe's room and then approached the doctor.

"All is going admirably . . . admirably . . ." said the latter, speaking the moment that he caught sight of Owen's pale, strained face. "A braver little lady I never saw.

You can put every confidence in Nurse Stebbins. I shall return in an hour or so. . . ."

"'An hour or so!'"

Owen felt suddenly as though all London had swayed a little, as at the tail-end of an earthquake. "You're not *going* . . .?"

Lindsay Fulke smiled the compassionate, slightly superior smile which he reserved for unreasonable husbands in such instances.

"My dear Mr. Randolph, your good lady will not need my services for some hours yet. Indeed, she is so remarkably brave and strong that I think Dame Nature could take care of her without my assistance. Except that you had exacted a promise from me, I should not return until"—he consulted his watch on its broad black fob—"until at least one o'clock. As it is, I shall be with you again by eleven."

"Good God! Do you mean to say that she will have to suffer all that time? That it won't be over before one o'clock?"

The perspiration stood on Owen's forehead. He caught his lip in his teeth. "It's damnable!" he said in a choked voice.

Fulke put his hand on his arm.

"You must face facts, my dear sir," said he. "Mrs. Randolph is doing nicely,—very nicely indeed. Your inexperience makes you unnecessarily anxious." Nurse King here came out again and they persuaded Owen that the doctor could do nothing for Phoebe at present.

Owen awoke suddenly to the fact that both had the most heartless faces he had ever seen. Nurse King's was perfectly impassive, she even smiled a little. Still worse was a certain expression of preoccupation on Fulke's sanguine, intelligent countenance, set neatly between grey mutton-chop whiskers. Owen told himself bitterly that butchers had just such amiably heartless expressions.

He went back into the dining-room when the doctor had left, and found America crouching over the fire, rocking to and fro and nursing her brown face in both hands, as though she had a toothache.

"What are you doing here?—Aren't you needed in the other room?" he asked sharply.

She burst into forlorn sobs.

"I don' *want* Miss Phoebe to have no horrid ole baby!"

she wailed. "My po', precious, own sugar-lady! God's mean! I don't *want* her to have no baby!"

"America . . ." he began sternly. His lips shook. He turned and went out into the narrow corridor that led past his own bedroom to the bathroom at the back of the house. It seemed to him that he paced this corridor for hours. Listening, with checked heart about which the blood felt clotted, for some dreadful cry to reach him, he was torn between two thoughts. The thought that he thanked God he was not responsible for her present anguish . . . the dreadful reactive thought of how another man was responsible—the thought of Richard as the father of the child that was perhaps even now rending away her life. Up and down he walked—up and down, for hours, days, ages—how could he tell?——

Hark! That was a door opening . . . were they coming to tell him that she was dead? It was Nurse King again. And now her face looked kinder. She was not smiling.

"Mrs. Randolph is asking for you, sir. . . ."

He could not go quickly enough. He ran,—his lip between his teeth. He was frightened, horribly frightened. What dreadful sight would he be called to look upon? But she wanted him. That was enough. . . .

She was standing in the centre of the room, gripping a chair with both hands. He saw the little knuckles yellow-white with that desperate grip. Her hair lay in wet strands across her forehead. But her eyes blazed, wonderful, as if on fire, in her pinched, flushed face. And, as familiar as that face was, yet it seemed somehow the face of a stranger. This was a Phoebe that he had never seen. Nurse Stebbins stood just behind her, coaxing her in a low, steady voice to lie down.

"Phoebe . . . my darling . . . I am here. What is it?" he cried, running to her.

"I want to tell you . . . to tell you . . . before I die. . . ." Suddenly she cast a wild glance all about, as though for help. Then she stammered:

"No! No! Go away. . . . Go away. . . ."

Nurse Stebbins flung her arms about her.

"Go, sir. . . . You'd better go now. . . ."

But Phoebe had recovered for the time being. With great drops trickling down her little ghastly face, she tried to speak coherently.

"I'm not afraid, but I must tell him. . . . I must tell him. . . . I can't die until I've told him. . . ."

"My darling! My own little Phoebe, there's nothing that you could tell me would make a straw of difference! Nothing . . . nothing. . . . Nurse, can't you get her to lie down? Let me help you to your bed, my poor darling."

Heedless of them both, she kept stammering. "I must tell you. . . . I can't die till I've told you. . . . Send her away. . . . I must tell you alone . . . all alone. . . ."

Owen was at his wits' end. He turned to the nurse.

"Could you leave us a moment, nurse? Would it be safe?"

She answered in a discreet murmur:

"She hardly knows what she's saying, sir. I think you'd better slip out quietly, the first chance."

Suddenly Phoebe loosed her desperate hold of the chair. She reached out with her little hands that were cramped from the fierce clutching, and seized the breast of his coat.

"Forgive . . . forgive . . ." she stuttered. Then the blood rushed over her face in a dark wave. She loosed him, beat the air with her hands. . . . Between them, he and the nurse got her to the bed.

"You'd better go now, sir. You can't help. . . ."

He went out, stumbling at the door. He felt deathly, physically sick, and his heart was like lead with helpless pity.

He went again through the dining-room on his way to the corridor. The negress was now lying face down on the hearth-rug, her hands over her ears, yet there had been no cries coming from that closed room. This strange silence was almost worse than cries. He looked at America with a sudden feeling of tenderness. But he could not speak. He passed on into the corridor. Now he lengthened his walk to its utmost limit, and, reaching the bathroom window, he gazed down at the murky maze of London spreading on every side. Hundreds of thousands of houses, hundreds of thousands of women in them,—many enduring at this moment what *she*—his dear, his "winsome," as she loved him to call her—was enduring there in that room, with its ghastly array of white linen. And as the thought of Richard lashed him again he knew that to kill him simply would not suffice; that torture was the only thing that could satiate this famished rage in himself—this

thirst for retaliation, for the assuaging glut of retribution. The old, fierce death by quartering—the four maddened horses dragging the human flesh asunder . . . *that* would be the death for her betrayer—for the bowelless wretch that had brought her to this pass.

Dr. Fulke returned, left again for an hour, again returned. This time he stated his intention of remaining until Mrs. Randolph was delivered.

Five o'clock had come. America brought Owen a cup of scalding tea into the corridor, and stood by like a faithful, fierce little dog until he had drunk it. Her big eyes, all puffy from weeping, looked like horse-chestnuts glistening between their split brown hulls. . . . Then she went away again. As she opened the door into the dining-room—heavy, cloying, nauseating, the smell of ether stole through the whole apartment.

"Thank God . . ." thought Owen, with a deep breath. "Thank God . . . they're giving her ether. . . ." His mind went on, working feverishly, automatically. "We're ungrateful wretches. The name of the man who invented anæsthetics ought to be better known than Shakespeare's. There ought to be statues. . . . I will give a statue to him myself. . . . Men are ungrateful dogs. . . . Who knows his name? I don't. . . . I've heard it, but I've forgotten. . . . They used to strap people to tables and carve them like beef. . . . Now there is ether—chloroform. . . . Yet we don't remember the man's name! . . . I'd rather have been that man than any who ever lived. . . . But there were several. . . . Any one of them, then. . . . All's quiet now. . . . The ether . . . the ether . . . the ether. . . . Thank God for ether . . . ether . . . ether. . . ."

. . . He went to the window of the bathroom and looked down again at the town, now but a dark, roaring chaos, pricked by innumerable lights all blurred with fog. He thought of the bits of paper that his mother used to burn for him on the nursery hearth at World's-End. The sparks of their soft black surface, as the flame died out, were like these lights of London on the sooty darkness. And as he stared at the great leviathan of the town crouched there below him in the night,—it seemed to him that a vast spirit hung above it,—the composite wraith of all those millions of tiny souls that went to make its hugeness—the invisible molecules in the vast ego that was

London. Darkly it brooded there, the sinister sum-total, the one unique,—bodiless yet more powerful than any bulk of brawn and sinew—the soul, as it were, of the incomparable, unspeakable town, formed of the millions of little severed souls, that fared feverishly, each wrapped in its nursery-dream of separate individuality,—in what the Brahmans call the "great heresy of self." . . .

A door opened and shut. . . . Another. . . . Footsteps went to and fro. Were they seeking for him to tell him that she was dead? Yes . . . there . . . in the light of the corridor he saw the gleam of a nurse's cap. . . . Nurse King's voice called:

"Mr. Randolph! Mr. Randolph!"

He came forward with his ashen face and wet forehead, and stood dumbly staring at her.

"Ah, it's you, sir. Dr. Fulke sent me to tell you that you have a fine little daughter, sir. Mrs. Randolph has had a beautiful time.—And she's been so brave—not even one cry!—I've never seen the like of it."

When he was admitted to her room, some hours later, it was all sweet and fragrant with the homely perfume of orris and warm flannel. A shaded lamp burned on the floor, but in the reflection from the big round of light cast by it on the white ceiling he could see her clearly as she lay, long and slim, in the fresh, pure bed. And, first of all, he was struck by her virginal look as of a little snow-maid, lying there with her baby upon one languid arm, scarcely curved to hold it. Even in motherhood she was Helen's daughter.

Nurse Stebbins slipped out as he came in, and he went and knelt beside the bed. Not even daring to feel for her free hand under the bedclothes, he pressed his lips to the quilt of pale blue silk that outlined her slight body. With a little human thrill of relieved jealousy, he saw that the child was not at her breast,—for in his ignorance he did not know that a woman may not suckle her child until several days after its birth.

——Her eyes, soft, shining, assuaged, imploring, yet strangely exultant, stole up to his. Her little face, purified by God only knew what wild fires of anguish and initiation, smiled shyly, tremulously. Down in the deeps of that anguish which holds the mystery of life all had been swept from Phoebe but the one new, overwhelming sense of motherhood. For the present remorse and shame

were forgotten. It seemed as though she had plunged under a dark river which had cast her on a far shore with her baby, giving her temporarily the supreme gift of oblivion.

Even the sight of Owen's moved face did not break the surface of the still pool of mother-love in which she seemed to float, absolved from all physical and mental pain for the time being.

"My sweet . . . my winsome . . ." he whispered, tears starting from his eyes. One fell upon the hand that she had drawn from beneath the bedclothes and clasped weakly about his big fingers. She lifted it and kissed away the tear. Her lips formed words, but so low that he had to bend his ear close to catch them.

"Do . . . you . . . love me?"

He caught the little nerveless hand and pressed it passionately to his lips and eyes, and again it was all wet with tears.

"Then . . . look," she said, and her lowered eyelids showed him where she would have him look.

Yes, the inevitable moment was come. He had forefelt it often with anguish and vain shrinking. Now it was here.

Bending forward, her hand still to his cheek, he looked down on the little creature in its cocoon of soft white flannel. It was what some nurses call a "waxen baby." Like a little image of purest wax it looked, its lashes making two dark lines like circumflex accents on its tiny face; its faintly rosed mouth sucking in sleep. And upon its brow, just peeping from the warm flannel, lay a little down of gold, like pollen on a white flower leaf. And there, as Phoebe, in her strange new pride, pressed the bedclothes further back,—there, almost incredibly perfect, was a little hand, with bud-like thumb and petal fingers; with nails as perfectly finished and polished as though the most skilful manicure in London had just been tending them. And this little hand moved him with an odd yet profound and pitiful tenderness. He had thought to hate this child—to have to do fierce battle with instinctive loathing,—yet now, at sight of that tiny hand, so perfectly, almost absurdly, finished,—all that stirred in his heart was this feeling of pity and tenderness.

"Feel it—how soft it is . . ." whispered Phoebe.

And he ventured to touch with one of his big fingers the ridiculously perfect little hand.

The finger-petals spread, waved feebly. He moved his finger down against them; instantly they closed tight about it, and a queer thrill ran up his arm to his heart.

He heard Phoebe's low, passionate whisper:

"Oh, love her . . . love her . . . *please*. . . ."

He stooped lower and kissed the little hand clenched so determinedly about his finger.

Then Nurse Stebbins came in again, and said, smiling, that he must go.

XXXIII

SALLY had answered, under a hot impulse, Richard's letter, written just before he sailed. This answer was stern and indignant, full of bitter reproaches and harsh irony, and in it she made known her implacable resolve that he should marry Phoebe;—no matter how far he fled —(what hurt her, perhaps, most cruelly of all, she said, was that her son should play the coward)—nor how long he delayed the issue;—that and that alone could modify her utter, her heart-broken disappointment in him. He knew well how she had dreaded an early marriage for him, —any marriage, in fact, unless one of exceptional promise, —when he should be at least thirty-five,—let him judge, then, what must be the state of her feelings when she assured him from the inmost depths of her soul that this marriage was his only means of escape from her absolute contempt. There were pages and pages of this letter, written in her querulous, pointed hand, in which the a's and d's were never closed, and the crossings of the t's soared high above the line, like the bent curves that children make to represent birds flying; but this statement of her fixed resolve in regard to his marrying Phoebe was the gist of all its wrathful scorn and stinging denunciation.

Richard was sheltering with Stokes from the intolerable heat of a Chinese August in the bungalow of some friends at Swatow, when he received this letter, and as he finished reading it and crumpled it back into its thin sheath lined with oiled paper (Sally had been determined that no mischance of weather should destroy it during its

long voyage) he felt as though he must take the next steamer back to America in order to bring his personality to bear directly upon his mother. She had never yet, in the long run, been able to resist that subtle, invisible force which his presence exerted over her. But the next instant he thanked whatever gods there be that he had had the lucky inspiration of this journey with Stokes. Otherwise —and he shivered with indignant repulsion—otherwise he might at this very instant be cast in the play of life for the *rôle* of husband—that part, to him, so lugubriously middle-class and lacking in all spiritual *éclat*. The superiority of Jehovah to Jove, in that the former was an unwedded deity, had made him often declare that the Hebrews had a far more distinguished mythological imagination than the Greeks. No—nature had not endowed him with his unique, super-original personality, to case it in the motley of a "husband." Domesticity was surely the most crass affront that civilisation had ever offered to genius. Besides—had his mother really become his enemy—that she should propose that he, with his subtle, costly tastes, that were as the breath of life to him, that, in fact, constituted his being as distinct from other beings—with his necessity for exquisite and appropriate surroundings, on an allowance of only eight thousand a year—that she should propose marriage for him with a penniless girl?

In the end the whole thing amounted to this—he was to choose between genius and domesticity—domesticity, moreover, made doubly oppressive by poverty. Eight thousand a year as a means of artistic subsistence for one was meagre enough, the gods of art knew well—but eight thousand shared with a wife and children. . . . Richard shivered again in the muggy August air, gazing out over the lovely port of Swatow, now twinkling through the heat-haze with its pretty island, where they dined sometimes in the cool grey of the evening.

It assuaged him a little to realise that he stood on ground so far from Virginia and that his perturbed gaze rested on Chinese waters. It took over a month for letters to reach America from here. By the time his reply found her his mother would be in a more reasonable mood. He would put it to her—but, of course, with delicate indirection—whether she really contemplated asking him to tear off the wings of his genius with his own hands. And he thought of those who to him were the greatest ones on

earth, Nietzsche, Alexander, Leonardo, Machiavelli, Cesare Borgia, Baudelaire, Napoleon—would they have flung aside their birthright for the mess of domestic pottage?—Did not life teach the true artist to be even more ruthless to others and himself—rather than kinder, as that gifted bourgeois, Goethe, had said? And, now that he thought of it, Goethe himself had not evolved that maxim of kindness until he had passed over the dead bodies of many a wayside love. Fancy what the world would have lost had Goethe's mother insisted on his marrying one of his early flames! The world of art would have suffered even more than Goethe himself, but the pangs of both would have been irreparable. No, it was a great lesson in the super-moral moralities that Dostoievsky had meant to symbolise in "*Le Crime et le Châtiment*"—in that terrible and brutal test of murder which the hero sets himself. To prove strength, whether by single murders, as Raskolnikoff did, or by wholesale slaughter, as had been the method of Napoleon—that was the essential thing. The wretched "Praying Mantis" devoured by the female in the very act of submissive love, such should be the emblem of all husbands.

He felt calmed by these reflections, and during intervals of the next two days inscribed to his mother the third lengthy epistle that he had ever written, in which all these ideas were skilfully embodied.

Long before Richard's letter reached her, however, the extreme bitterness of his mother's resentment against him had waned. The crisis of impotent rage evoked in her by Owen's marriage with Phoebe had its natural reaction, and in this reaction an unreasoning pity for the son who by it had been deprived of what she had come to consider his birthright softened her feelings towards him. After all, wiser and older men than he had succumbed to passions which had wrecked their lives; and she thought of Parnell and the tragic story of his career, ruined by an unlawful love.—Still, in the very sources of her being, the knowledge that her son had acted with cowardice and baseness was like a bitter dust clouding the waters.

Sometimes, in the midst of her own pain, she wondered to what extent he suffered, for she would not admit even to herself that possibly Richard had not felt more than passing qualms of anger at having yielded to so unwise and dangerous an impulse. She insisted upon picturing

him as a victim of remorse, and persuaded herself that in time, despite all his violent aversion, he would of himself have come to marriage with the girl as the only reparation possible to his own manhood as well as to her. And, shrinking from dealing him the fresh blow that news of his uncle's marriage would bring him, she delayed telling him until two months after Owen and Phoebe had sailed.

This letter, posted during the middle of September, reached Bombay after Richard had left, and was forwarded by the clerk in the hotel; unfortunately, however, the Babu confused the address with that of another traveller, and Richard never received it. His next home-news came from Mary, and consisted of an account of his mother's illness. She begged him to return as soon as possible, as she (Mary) thought that Sally was fretting for him, though she never said so.

And now, indeed, Richard really suffered. His affection for his mother was the one really sound and vital feeling in his life. He could but think that this sudden illness was in great part, if not wholly, due to him, and with a wretched and belated remorse tugging at his heart he took the next steamer for Brindisi.

On the Cunarder at Naples was a Southerner named Grierson, a bumptious, over-genial person, whom Richard in his present mood took special pains to avoid. But the second day out, as they were nearing Gibraltar, Grierson, who was standing with a woman at the taffrail, leaned behind her and offered his field-glasses to Richard.

There was nothing for it but to thank him and stare through them. When he turned to give back the glasses the woman had disappeared and he was *tête-à-tête* with Grierson.

"Ever up there?" asked the latter, with a jerk of the head towards the Rock.

"No," said Richard.

"I've been. Glad I went, now, though it was an awful bore. So hot between those high walls going up that the Missus fainted. But no one can go now, so I'm glad I did go."

"Naturally," said Richard.

He made a movement as if to pass on, but Grierson said:

"Hold on a minute. I'm a great admirer of that cracked uncle of yours. Most public-spirited private

citizen in the South. And I've a friend wants to consult him about some pretty fine schemes, socialistic and all that, you know. I'll be deucedly obliged if you can tell me when his honeymoon in foreign parts will be over?"

Richard frowned. He disliked jocosity, and particularly when applied to matters even indirectly connected with himself:

"I beg your pardon?" he said, as if he had misunderstood.

"I only want to know how long before he returns to America. My wife says that his bride has been cutting a wide row in English 'sassiety.'" (Grierson was the sort of man to call society "sassiety" as a jest.)

"I really don't understand," said Richard coldly. "Whose 'bride'?"

"Why, your uncle's, of course—Owen Randolph's. He *is* your uncle, isn't he?"

Grierson's stodgy, clean-shaven face looked chap-fallen, and his "chaps" were of such dimensions as to make such a change very noticeable.

Richard answered rather sharply, for he was beginning to feel a vague uneasiness. "Yes, he's my uncle—but. . . ."

Light dawned on Grierson. He gave a sort of view-hulloa and smacked his great thigh in its plaid knicker-bocker.

"Oh, I say, Bryce," he shouted, with singular offensiveness, it seemed to Richard. "I believe I'm giving you news! *I don't believe you've heard of his marriage!*"

Richard looked at him with still anger, his brows knitted.

"Your pleasantries are somehow not amusing to me," he said. "I don't laugh easily."

Grierson calmed himself.

"But really, you *did* know he was married, didn't you?"

Grierson was of too stout a fibre to be snubbed easily. He stood there in his genial vulgarity, still smiling into Richard's gloomy face.

It was too late for the latter to pretend a knowledge which he did not have. Besides, he felt sure that this offensive bounder must be retailing some newspaper gossip, as unfounded as it was unpleasant.

"I have been in the East since May," he now said

sternly, "but if you are speaking seriously I feel sure that you have been misinformed."

"No, my son," said Grierson jovially. (Richard flushed with anger.) "I'm not misinformed, by Jingo!—Married sure and fast is the hardened Benedick.—Married on the 8th of July by a man I know—the Reverend Henry Nelson. I got it from him, so it's a sure deal."

Richard stared silently out to sea. He could scarcely credit what he had heard, yet Grierson's last words had the true note of conviction. Richard's whole mind was bent on keeping his face impassive.

"My letters must have miscarried," he said finally in a cold voice.

"So you don't even know who the bride was, hey?—Well! I'm in luck to be handing out fresh news on a liner. A perfect little beauty, they say, and the Reverend Nelson's second cousin. You must know her, of course, Bryce? They live near your place up in Buckfastleigh County. No, they're in Queen Charlotte, I believe—Phoebe Nelson . . . old 'Family-Tree' Nelson's little girl. 'Crabbed age and youth' . . . 'January in the lap of May'—ha-ha! But of course that's only my joke. Owen Randolph's a fine man for many a year yet."

Richard pulled off his glove as deliberately as he had drawn it on. He rolled it carefully up with the other and fastened the outer wrist-button.

"Whom did you say my uncle has married?" he asked in a detached voice.

"Phoebe Nelson . . . old Tom Nelson's daughter. You know her, don't you?"

"Slightly," said Richard.

"Is she such a beauty as they're making out in England?"

"Very charming. Excuse me. I've an engagement." He turned and went forward, leaving Grierson *planté*. Even that easy-going person's gorge rose at this cavalier treatment.

"Puppy!" thought he; "needs to get his face smacked."

Then suddenly light broke.

"Oh-ho!" he thought, grinning. "I see which way the cat jumps. Uncle's millions slipping elsewhere!"—And he stumped joyously to the smoking-room to recount over a high-ball how "hacked" that stuck-up chap Bryce had looked at the news of his uncle's marriage. Hadn't heard

it, by Jingo! Got positively green . . . pea green over it!

In the meantime Richard had walked nervously forward until he was in the bow of the *Cyclopic*. He leaned there in the steady breeze, his cap under his arm for safety, watching the sluicy crash of the ice-green water under the ship's foot, "Phoebe . . . he's married Phoebe. . . . No. Impossible. . . . But perhaps it's true? . . . What, then? . . . Phoebe . . . married to Uncle Owen. . . . Impossible . . . but if it's true? . . . Then . . ."

He stared down at the sleek curve of the ton-weights of massive water, in which the foam was submerged like clots of powdered glass. And there, through the salt tang of the sea wind, a breath of flower-scented air seemed to reach him. . . . He saw the moonlight on wet lawns. . . . A soft, parted mouth quivered beneath his. . . .

He put his bent forefinger against his lip and bit it nervously. Here was another infernal tangle. . . . He wished to God now that he had not told his mother. He might have managed if only he and Phoebe were in the secret . . . but now, with his mother always watching him. And they would have to meet. He could not withdraw from all intercourse with his uncle—cease going to World's-End entirely . . . that would rouse conjecture at once, if not suspicion.

"God! what a damnable position," he said aloud—but he could scarcely hear his own words for the wind at the bow.

Then, without warning, the grimmest aspect of his dilemma rushed upon him. The money . . . his uncle's fortune . . . it would go now to the latter's wife and children, of course. His chil— . . . Richard's mind checked, staggered, in the midst of this thought. That coming child . . . the child that was really his . . . Richard's . . . would be looked on by his uncle as *his* child. . . .

Richard stared and stared at the thundering volume that poured smooth and blackly green from under the ship's-foot, sending up great, tumbled masses of silverish spume.

"It's impossible . . . incredible," he thought again. "That ass has gorged a lot of newspaper lies. . . . I'll not believe it." And again the little after-voice in his mind whispered, "But if it's true!—What then?"

The *Cyclopic* reached New York towards the end of

December, and Richard went straight from the dock to his mother's flat, where Mary had written they were going in October.

Mary met him in the hall. He changed colour when he saw her, and this moved Mary of the Tender Heart, because she had not believed him capable of the emotion that she saw unmistakably written now in his face.

She kept his hand very kindly in hers a moment.

"Don't look so anxious. I really think she's better lately . . . ever since we got your wire."

"Thank God," said Richard, having recourse to one of the banal expressions of common humanity in his intense relief. His face worked, and Mary turned away, feeling quaintly that to have surprised Richard in the grasp of so uncomplicated an emotion as filial love was like having glimpsed his soul in its under-garments. She opened the sitting-room door to let him go in alone, and closed it softly behind him.

Sally was lying on a couch after her noonday drive. Her eyes seemed immense in their deep, brownish circles. Richard stood looking at her, his face still quivering, and she gazed back at him, a dull red gathering on her cheek-bones. Then suddenly her set expression broke, she held out her thin arms. With an awkward step or two, Richard reached them, his head was on his mother's breast. He was crying like a little lad, and Sally held him tight, saying, "My boy. . . . My boy. . . ."

Richard drew back his head presently and looked at her unashamed, his face all smeared with tears. "What I have endured since Mary wrote me . . ." he whispered. He felt for his handkerchief vainly, and Sally took out hers and wiped his eyes and cheeks, then let him take the crumpled ball from her.

"And to feel that it was my doing. . . . Mother! that was hell. . . ."

The sick pelican hastened to denude herself still more.

"No . . . no. . . . It wasn't your doing, my darling—that is, only partly. Oh, Richard! Richard! What dreadful madness possessed you . . . you, of all people?"

"I don't know, Mother. . . . Nature plays curious tricks on one. . . ."

He sat on the edge of the sofa, holding her thin hand in his, kissing it from time to time and staring gloomily at the carpet.

"But, my son, if you felt temptation coming. . . ."

"It wasn't like that, mother. I can't explain. . . . It came like a cloudburst. . . . I had no more idea of such a thing than of suicide. . . ."

Sally gave a heartrending sigh.

"It was almost suicide, my poor boy."

"Yes . . . I know," he said.

"Richard, . . ." said Sally (there was a cruel, unwomanly hope in her voice. She was all mother now). "Did she . . . did she . . . lead you on?"

"No, mother," said Richard.

Sally sighed again.

"But she's a light girl, for all that," she said.

Richard grew pale.

"No, mother," he said again, in a low voice but very distinctly.

"Not! . . . But how, then, could she give herself to another man in less than two months . . . after?"

Richard glanced up quickly. The blood settled on his cheek bones just as his mother's had done when he entered.

"Then it's true?" he said.

"What is true?" asked Sally, puzzled.

"That . . . she's married—to my uncle?"

Sally started up on her elbow.

"Richard!—Didn't you get my letter?"

"No, mother. I thought one of your letters must have miscarried."

"Didn't—Mary mention it?"

"No. A vulgar brute called Grierson told me aboard ship."

"What! You learned this awful thing from a stranger? . . . Oh, my poor, poor boy!"

She sank back and tears came into her eyes.

Richard knelt down beside the sofa and looked at her imploringly.

"Mother, dear, if you get agitated, Mary won't let me stay with you. Please, please don't worry about me. You make me feel the most worthless wretch in the world with your unselfishness." (This must have been an emotion sufficiently novel to have its bitter-sweet for Richard.) "It is you alone that I am thinking of in all this—and you must think of yourself and not of me."

Sally smiled a smile as subtle and faint as Mona Lisa's.

"When I cease to think of you I shall no longer be myself," she said.

Richard sat silent, kissing from time to time her thin hand where the rings looked cruelly heavy now.

Suddenly Sally spoke.

"Richard . . . I must tell you that I was doing all in my power for the girl."

Richard kissed her hand.

"Everything—everything that was possible I did for her. When she fell ill I went and nursed her myself."

"She was ill?"

"Yes. Very ill, or seemed to be. I've thought since that it was part of a scheme to work on your uncle's sympathies. . . . That girl is much cleverer than she seems, Richard."

Richard swallowed. This was the stale after-taste of pleasure that kept rising in his throat under his mother's persistent words.

"It . . . it isn't in her nature to scheme . . . believe me, mother."

Sally put up her nervous, sallow hand and turned his face to the light.

"Had you more love for her than you will admit, Richard?" she asked.

"No, mother. . . . I . . . I was fond of her. But . . . that is not the question. Mere justice is the question. It isn't in her to scheme or plot."

"I wonder at your action in leaving the country if such has always been your opinion of her," said his mother, with the first taint of bitterness in her voice.

"It was my horror of marriage in the abstract. . . ."

"But you would have married her if . . .?"

"Mother, whatever you had insisted on my doing I should have done. But it would have shattered my whole life."

"And what is it now, with all your possessions stripped from you?" she asked sombrely.

"At least," said Richard with some dignity, "I possess my own soul. In a marriage like that I should have possessed neither my soul nor my body."

"I don't believe you have yet realised what this marriage means to you—to your whole future."

"Yes . . . I realise it."

"Yet you defend the girl? Her ingratitude to me . . .

the wanton lightness with which she went from one man's arms to another's at the first beckoning?''

That dusky red flew into Richard's face again. Somewhere down, down in the primal depths of his virility stirred an instinct that leads the male to defend female things worried by other females.

''I don't believe the woman lives who could have resisted such a temptation,'' he said.

Sally was angry with him for resisting *her*, yet something in her felt glad that he resisted.

''You must excuse my one-sidedness,'' she said coldly. ''I confess that my view of the whole affair is a very partial one. I think of you first . . . the girl last of all. Though, as I said, I did all for her that was in my power.''

''I knew you would,'' murmured Richard. He was suffering extremely at present, had his mother only guessed it. By her very severity she had compelled him to defend the defenceless, and, in so doing, the ruthlessness of his own course towards Phoebe became partially evident to him. He wondered whether his mother would often bring up this odious and painful subject. As she got stronger he must let her know that it was beyond endurance distasteful to him. Just at present, however, he had no course but to submit. He added now:

''You have the right to make me any reproaches in your power. I deserve them all, and more than all. But I would be a hound if I let you think too badly of . . . of . . .''

He could not pronounce Phoebe's name. Again he kissed his mother's hand and sat silent.

Sally took up another side of the question. ''Have you thought how terribly embarrassing it will be when they come back?'' she asked.

''Yes . . .''

''It will be impossible for you to avoid them altogether. Owen would begin to wonder. . . . You will have to come to World's-End sometimes. Richard! What a horrible . . . what an unthinkable situation!''

''I know,'' he said thickly.

''But you will have to do it sometimes. If Owen should ever dream. . . . But of course that's impossible. Only you will have to be frightfully careful. . . . I wish now that you had not told me.''

"Yes—I have wished that too," said Richard under his breath, "ever since I heard of the marriage."

"They will be coming back in the spring, I suppose," Sally continued. "Good God! . . ." she broke off.—"The . . . the . . . child. . . . I shall have to sit there knowing it is *your* child. . . . There, with her and you and Owen . . . with her knowing that *I* know. . . . Oh, it's too much! It's too much! I can't stand it. . . . I can't. . . ."

She struggled up, holding by his arm and gasping for breath. Richard was wild with alarm. He called desperately for Mary. She came running with a glass in her hand. She had foreseen some such contingency as this. Supporting Sally's head very tenderly, she held to her nostrils a handkerchief with a little globule of nitrate of amyl crushed in its folds, then, when the stricture in her chest was relieved, gave her the medicine in the glass.

And as she eased her back upon the pillow, while Richard stood looking on, helpless and ghastly pale, she thought: "No, I can never leave her now. How strange! Some of us seem destined to be 'prisoners of hope' all our lives. I thought I was free at last when Aunt Lucy went—and now here is poor Sally. There's no woman but me whom she really loves or who loves her . . . and I can't leave her to a trained nurse. Well, if only for Owen's sake I must do it . . . but then I'm fond of her, too,—poor, poor Sally!"

She sat down by the couch, fanning Sally with a little Spanish fan from a table near by, though it was snowing outside, and whispered to Richard that he had better go.

He went submissively, looking back from the door at his mother's ghastly face on the violet cushion with a sick spasm of his own heart. He was exhausted as though from cruel physical exercise, and his brain felt like gritty fluff within his hot skull. Truly a great matter had been kindled by his little fire. One careless spark of passion, like a burning shred from some holiday bonfire—and all his ordered world was a conflagration.

XXXIV

BUT Phoebe and Owen did not return to America that spring, as Sally had thought. Little "Susan Diana," as the baby was quaintly named, had an illness in April which hung on for some time, and which Dr. Fulke said would make a sea voyage that summer extremely risky for her.

The baby's name was the result of much cogitation on the part of Phoebe and Owen. Phoebe did not wish her name given to it, neither did Owen. If they had named it Mary, Sally would have been jealous. They both felt, though neither could tell the other of these feelings, that to call it after Sally would not do. And Owen winced at the thought of the child's bearing his own mother's name, and the name of Phoebe's mother was not suggested either. So they had decided to call the little one after its two godmothers,—and, by Tante Suzanne's request, "Diana" was the name chosen for use. She could not bear, she had said, to think of another "*pauvre fillette écrasée par un nom aussi hideux que le sien.*"

In June they had gone to stay at "Bois Dormant," the Mauvigny château in Normandy, for the summer, and in July Owen went to America for three weeks, to see Sally, who was still far from well, and to give a glance at his affairs. By the autumn little Diana was as lively and rosy an atom as could be desired, and in the last week of September they sailed from Havre for New York.

It was on a day all glittering blue and gold that Phoebe came back to "World's-End," whence, in the little "jumper," behind Kildee, she had driven away in such a daze of misery. As they passed over the stone bridge at the foot of the lawn she looked down at the Green-Flower, now all embroidered with patterns of red and yellow autumn leaves, and thought of that day. How madly wretched she had been then,—and now—— But now, in spite of all the love and care that surrounded her,—because of it, indeed, was she not at times even more wretched,—with a deeper, more hopeless misery? For the first ecstasy of motherhood had passed, leaving her no less devoted to her baby, but at the same time making place for that anguish of remorse which wrung her when she saw Owen so tender to the child that he thought his

own,—about which she had deceived him with a cowardly silence worse than actual lying.

He had trusted her, honoured her, saved her, and she had done this dreadful thing to him.

Then suddenly the hunger for happiness rose in her, wild and fierce as the physical hunger of the starving, and all her young irresponsibility revolted from stern codes and the inner voice which so ruthlessly condemned her. But now reaction had seized her for the moment, and she found sweetness in the contrast of that day with this. It seemed to her that life,—her life, at least,—was far stranger than anything that people wrote in books, for she could see the wraith of herself sitting huddled and stupefied in the jumper in her shrunk white linen frock—all alone . . . more lonely than any one in the world, she thought—and now, over that same bridge she was passing in a smart carriage, her husband beside her, Giles, the baby's nurse, tall, thin, and very English, on the seat in front, and on her knees little Diana herself, "burbling" like a joyous "Jabberwock." Giles had given her a china dog to play with, for her teeth were coming fast and she loved the feeling of the cool porcelain on her hot little gums; and alternately she sucked the round, inane head with its blue eyes and brown ears, or beat with the animal's whole person on Owen's knee.

"Da-da-da-da-da-da," said Diana gaily, with every inflection of assertion and enquiry possible to imagine.

Phoebe looked at her thoughtfully.

"I do really believe she's trying to say, 'Ta-ta,' Owen. What do you think, Giles?".

"P'r'aps, m'm. She's very quick to learn."

"Da-da-da-da," said Diana, and suddenly smote her in the face with the china dog, chuckling rapturously.

"Oh, Giles!" cried Phoebe, "I'm afraid she's cut your lip."

Giles answered impassively from behind her handkerchief. "No, m'm. Only a slight bruise, m'm. 'Twas my fault. She's done it before. I should have been on the watch."

Here Diana bumped her head against her nurse's flat but motherly breast, and, taking the dog's head entirely into her own rosy mouth, mumbled it contentedly.

"Isn't it odd," said Phoebe to Owen, "how such a wee mouth *outside* can be so big *inside?*"

"As far as I can gather," said Owen, "babies are far more fearfully and wonderfully made than we are."

He was rejoiced to see Phoebe so calm, with what he knew must be such an ordeal looming directly ahead, for Sally had stayed on at World's-End with Mary to await their coming. Richard, Mary had written, was off to North Carolina for the autumn shooting.

But Phoebe was far from calm within. Her talk about the baby had only been to give Owen the impression that he had received. It seemed to her that this coming meeting with Sally was one of the hardest things that fate had yet brought upon her. But it was unavoidable. By night and day, waking and sleeping, for long months it had haunted her. She had tried hard to school herself against the grim hour.

She sat very straight, not leaning back, and her hands dug hard against each other under cover of her gloves. And as they drew nearer and nearer to the house, and she caught glimpses of the South Portico between the dance of red and yellow leaves, her face grew very pale and her eyes dilated.

Owen knew that look and his heart ached for her, yet there was nothing that he could do. In his ears was her piteous cry on the morning of her baby's birth. "I must tell you. . . . I can't die till I've told you." That memory was very precious to him. Could the nurse have left them together for a few moments he knew that, had he let her, she would have told him everything. . . .

Now they were passing the clump of seven great acacias on the east lawn. A crimson hammock was slung between two of them. Someone in a white gown was lying in it. As the carriage approached she sprang up, and he saw that it was Mary. She came running towards them. David drew up the bays, and her face, with its light-grey eyes all a-dance with excitement, looked up at them.

"Oh, Cousin Mary!—*Dear* Cousin Mary—get in! get in!" cried Phoebe.

Mary jumped in and sat down between Phoebe and Owen, taking a hand of either in her own.

"Oh, my dears! How glad I am to get you back!" she said. Tears twinkled on her short lashes. She winked them away and laughed. Then she caught sight of the baby.

"Oh, the sweet!" she gasped. "May I take her a minute?"

Phoebe caught up little Diana and put her in Mary's arms. Mary's heart leaped as she pressed the tiny, floss-covered head against it (Diana always snatched off instantly whatever headgear was put upon her). She was holding Owen's child in her arms. That was a terrible and beautiful moment. She could not tell which was greater, her pain or her feeling of exquisite tenderness. This, all unknown to her, was the most ironical moment of her life, but she did not dream it, and her heart overflowed with that feeling of anguished sweetness.

Diana was a singularly sweet-tempered child, imperious and courageous. She never howled at the ghastly sight of a strange face, as most babies do. Now she wriggled round in Mary's arms, and, freeing her little hand from the too-close embrace, pounded her blithely with the china dog.

"Da-da-da-da," said Diana to Mary.

And Mary, smothering her with kisses, said "Da-da-da" back to her again.

"Oh, aren't they *dear* together?" cried Phoebe. "She's partly yours, Cousin Mary. Look, Owen! How the little thing is staring right up in Mary's eyes!"

And, indeed, the child had thrown her head back on Mary's breast, and was gazing into the light-grey eyes out of her deep, violet ones, with that sudden look of mysterious solemnity that makes one feel sometimes as though a pilgrim of the ages were looking from a baby's eyes.

"It's as if she recognised her . . . as if she were seeing her again after a long, long time," said Phoebe, awed.

" 'I a child, very old, over waves, toward the house of maturity, the land of migrations, look afar,' " quoted Owen. "Who knows? . . . Perhaps she does recognise her!"

"Baby—baby," thought Mary in her secretly and passionately, yet sweetly, aching heart. "Perhaps we were nearer . . . far nearer, in another life. Perhaps there you were my very own . . . not lent to me kindly as you are now."

Suddenly Diana started as from a little sleep, and began her joyous poundings with the china dog again.

Mary spoke to them over her fluffy head.

"Sally is much, much better," she said. "Of course, she's greatly wrought up over your return. She doesn't say much, but I can see that this darling mite"—she squeezed the baby to her—"is in her thoughts from morning till night. She's been turning the old nursery into a regular bower. And she says primly: 'Owen shall have no cause of complaint if *I* can prevent it, or that English nurse, either.' Isn't that Sallyesque?"

"What does Patton think of her condition now?" asked Owen. They were nearly at the house.

"Much better. Excitement is bad for her, of course. Not pleasant excitement like this, though. And she can't rush up and down stairs and all over the place as she used to. It's very hard on her, poor dear. But, with moderate care, there's no reason to think that she won't live 'till her bones rattle,' as she says."

The carriage was stopping before the South Portico. They saw Sally's tall figure in a gown of mauvish heather-mixture, standing at the top of the steps. Owen helped Mary out, then turned and took Phoebe's hand. He kept it in his as they mounted the steps together.

Sally's eyes were fixed on little Diana in Mary's arms.

"Richard's child . . . Richard's child . . ." she kept saying to herself. Her teeth were clenched so hard that the muscles on her thin jaws stood out.

"Isn't she a *darling?*" cried Mary eagerly. She ran up the steps and put the baby in Sally's arms. There was nothing for it. The thin arms were obliged to close about the little thing, or else to let her drop upon the stones of the porch.

Sally stood, with a dusky red on either cheek-bone, holding her grandchild in her arms.

"Da-da-da-da," said Diana, pounding her thin breast with the china dog.

Giles stepped forward.

"Shall I take her, m'm," she suggested. "She gives nasty blows with that toy sometimes."

"Thank you," said Sally. Her arms loosened, and Giles took the baby.

Now Phoebe stood before her, her hand still in Owen's.

There was an instant's pause, then Sally bent forward and touched her cheek with set lips. Phoebe was white as death. She could not speak, but she gave Sally a touching, quite indescribable look as she drew back after

placing her dry kiss. The black eyes avoided the dark blue ones. Then Owen kissed Sally, and both he and Phoebe said how glad they were to hear from Mary that she was better.

"Oh, they've tinkered me up between them," she said drily. "But you know how much good a patched stirrup is. It always breaks at the most important fence."

She turned towards the front door.

"Shall we go up to the nursery?" she asked in Phoebe's direction, but still without looking at her.

"Please," said Phoebe in a low voice.

The nursery at World's-End was a delightful room, looking over the south lawn. It had four windows, as Owen's room had, two opening in cupboards in the wall, with the line of distant mountains, now bloomily blue, like grapes, showing through a network of yellow pear-leaves. The other windows were all one shimmer from the pale gold of the tulip trees outside, that fluttered in the soft October breeze. There was a log-fire in the big fireplace with its brass fire-dogs and fender of pierced brass. The white walls were hung with old prints,—the London "Cries." An old rose-and-white chintz, with a pattern representing little boys in short-waisted trousers fishing from a broken bridge, hung at the windows and covered the chairs and sofa. There was a small, single-post rosewood bed with a valance of this chintz for Giles, and a wee rosewood crib with twisted side-bars for the baby. Some toys were placed near the fire,—an old rocking-horse that had been Owen's and a little cart that Sally had often pulled him about in. She went now and opened a door, showing a bathroom tiled in white and rose that she had had added, making use of a large closet formerly used for wood.

"This is the addition I wrote you of," she said to Owen. "I thought it necessary."

"It was dear of you to think of it," he said warmly. "It's the very thing—eh, Giles?"

"Very nice indeed, sir, most comfortable, I call it, sir," said Giles, with unqualified approval. She was looking about with a sly surprise that tickled Owen greatly, in spite of the agitation of his inmost thoughts. She had so evidently braced herself to endure the life of a pioneer for the sake of Phoebe and the baby, to both of whom she was already sincerely attached. In any case, however, she

was ready to endure hardship at the command of "her Grace," whose under-housekeeper she had been for eight years. Before coming to Diana she had nursed the only child of Victor Hadringham's sister. And it was the death of this child, whom she adored, that had caused her to give up nursing for a time. She was a woman of some education and a quiet, determined character.

"Just the thing for that little Turk of a namesake of mine," Diana had said to Phoebe. "If Martha Giles can't manage her, no one can, for *you'll* never be able to do it, you soft-hearted dueky!"

Giles was a childless "widow woman," and expressed herself as thoroughly satisfied with her one experience.

A soft little noise, like the scratching of a mouse on the wainscoting, came at the door. It was Hannah, come to welcome "the young mistress"—("the bride," as they still called her below-stairs) and to see "Mr. Owen's baby."

She and Giles were presented to each other in due form. Giles told Phoebe afterwards that she "had no notion, m'm, asking your pardon, m'm, that a black person could be'ave so white-like." She and Hannah formed almost immediately a quiet friendship that lasted as long as they lived,—a consummation devoutly to be grateful for, as English servants in a Virginia country-place are forlorn exiles, as a rule.

They left Giles to the ordering of her new kingdom, and followed Sally downstairs to the rose-room for tea.

As Phoebe entered this room she grew white again. That faint yet individual perfume characteristic of all very old Virginia rooms, where beeswax and pot-pourri are freely used, recalled so bitingly to her the day when she had been in there alone with Sally, and had fainted from sheer horror and misery on that very sofa towards which Owen was now leading her.

"Won't you take off your furs?" asked Sally with cold civility, and Phoebe, with a start, began loosening her stole and jacket.

Mary ran up to help her.

"What lovely, lovely fur!" she exclaimed, holding it against her cheek. "Almost as soft as little Diana's hair. Isn't it exquisite, Sally?"

She held it towards her.

"Very handsome," said Sally, glancing up from the

teapot in her hand, then back again. Her acrid thought was:

"Marriage hasn't improved his socialism. Black sables are odd wear for a socialist's wife."

And, somehow, one of the bitterest things in all this bitter homecoming was that "that girl," as Sally still called her in her thought, should be wearing a stole and muff and hat of black sable.

Phoebe could not make up her mind to sit on that sofa to which Owen had led her. She drew up a little chair, and poised herself nervously on the edge with her cup of tea.

With her jacket and furs off, her figure in its brown chiffon blouse and sheath-like skirt of dark-brown cloth looked both taller and frailer than it used to.

This struck Mary.

"Why, Phoebe, darling," she said. "You've got too thin. We must mend that."

"Oh, I'm very, very well, Cousin Mary," said the girl, flushing slightly as she felt Sally's black eyes sweep over her. "I never was *fat*, you know."

"Yes, I do know, vain puss!—But there's a difference between slimness and thinness. Don't you find her thin, Sally?"

Sally rinsed a cup with delicate care.

"I find her looking very well," she said.

"Well, that or something certainly gives you quite 'an air,'" smiled Mary. "You're not my little village darling any more."

"Fancy!" said Phoebe, blushing and smiling very prettily.

Mary gave a delighted little trill of laughter.

"Oh, you imitative monkey!" she said. "I never heard anything so British in my life! Do you notice that English accent, Sally?—which the English laugh at us for calling it, by the way, and rightly, too, I must admit."

"Phoebe probably admires her friend, the Duchess of Wrexborough, extremely," dropped in Sally's dry voice. "Imitation is the sincerest flattery, you know."

"Poor Phoebe!" smiled Owen. "They're ragging you rather stiffly, aren't they?—Perhaps she's caught it from me. You know, Sally, you always say my accent can be 'cut with a knife.'"

"The case is slightly different, you must admit," re-

turned Sally. "Nearly all your youth was spent in England. Phoebe has only been there a few months."

"But I don't mean to do it," put in Phoebe earnestly. "I think it's beautiful, but I never tried to do it myself."

She looked rather distressfully at Owen.

"I like it, however it came about," said he, just touching the big sorrel coils. "So why worry?"

"I won't, then," said Phoebe, feeling suddenly courageous even towards Sally. This new feeling of courage was so pleasant that to exercise it she held out her cup to the tea-maker.

"May I have another?" she asked.

"With pleasure," said Sally. It was astonishing the secret bitterness that she managed to instill into this remark, so tempered that but for circumstances it would only have conveyed its meaning to the ears for which it was intended. There was a certain expression of kindly frankness about Owen's face, an openness almost boyish at times, which led people to think him an unobservant man. Even Sally had never penetrated this pleasant "persona" of his. She thought that she could chasten Phoebe's present state of undeserved prosperity unknown to any save themselves. But, behind the smiling lightness of his manner, anger was stirring in him. This was too bad of Sally, this veiled, hostile bitterness,—and it was stupid.

"When you've finished that cup, I think I'll take you to your room, dear," he now said. "It's a fagging journey from New York to Crewe"

Phoebe sprang up gladly, putting down her half-full cup.

"I don't want any more. I'd like to go now."

"The room over this . . . of course?" said Owen to Sally from the door. He saw her eyebrows twitch nervously.

"Yes" she said.

It had been their grandmother's and mother's bedroom, and opened into that of Owen's, who occupied his father's.

Phoebe gave a little cry of pleasure as they entered it. A lovely, homelike place it was, with its cheery mixture of white Empire and Chippendale and its old Aubusson carpet with a green ground circled by cornucopias of faded grey from which tumbled all the flowers of Flora's

garden. A fire of cedar-logs burned on the wide hearth, filling the room with its aromatic fragrance.

"Do you like it, 'honey-pot'?" he asked, amused and pleased, watching her as she darted from one object to another, like the humming-bird to which Mary had compared her.

"'Do I *like* it? . . . *Do* I like it?'" she echoed him, glowing and paling. She came and caught up his hand, meaning to press her lips to it, but he held hers fast and drew her to him instead.

"Phoebe," he said. "Mind, you're to come straight to me the first minute that World's-End brings you anything but happiness."

"Yes," she said obediently, but her heart said:

"I must be very, very careful. I must bear everything without a look, without a sign. No matter what she says or does to me, I must smile. I must seem happy. I must. I will."

Owen went away and sent America.

"Oh, America," said Phoebe, with her usual formula on such occasions, "*hug* me!"

America swooped down and squeezed her knees until she pinched them.

"Isn't it wonderful to be at home again, Rikky?"

"Miss Phoebe, sugar," said America solemnly, "when Pha-ry-Oh saw dat linch-pin a-comin' outer he cha'yot, an' no hand a-holdin' it, he *mought* a thought 'twas as wonderful as I does bein' home ag'in!"

"But you enjoyed yourself abroad, Rikky,—you told me so often."

"Yes, Miss Phoebe, I *j'yed* myse'f, but *j'yin'* ain't *happifyin'*."

XXXV

THE next morning Phoebe drove herself over to Nelson's Gift in the pretty phaeton which Owen had ordered for her before they came home.

America sat beside her, advanced for the moment over her *bête noire*, Giles,—with little Diana in her lap. The dimple in her round, brown cheek looked as though Aunt Polly had pricked it deep with a kitchen fork, as in her incomparable beaten-biscuits. "You know, Giles," Phoebe

had explained, "all America's nearest relatives live at my home, so you won't mind if I take her today, instead of you, to hold the baby."

"Certainly not, m'm. Your wishes are mine, m'm. Only I hope the minx don't fall into one of her tantrums with the poor dear lamb. 'Tis very ill for infants to be treated with temper, m'm."

"Oh,—she dare not!" exclaimed Phoebe.

"'Dare not' is something unbeknownst to her, asking your pardon, m'm. She would sauce one of the blessed Apostles if such a thing could befall. I've no patience with her, and that's the truth, m'm."

"Indeed. I think you have a great deal of patience with her, Giles," said Phoebe. "And I appreciate it very much. I scold her often for being so naughty to you."

"'Tis neither here nor there, m'm. I pay no regard to her whatsomedever. 'Tis all as if a black cat was gave to scratching, and a body kept out of reach and let it scratch the air. The little baggage—excuse my plain langwidge, m'm—may scratch the air and welcome, as long as she don't interfere with me. Tongue is a dish as is easy pickled with scorn."

"Well," said Phoebe, relieved, "I'm glad you look at it so sensibly, Giles. You're the greatest comfort to me. I was just writing to the duchess about you this morning."

"I thank you, m'm, I'm sure, m'm. I'll be beholden to you if you'll present my dutiful respeeks to her grace, m'm."

And so a triumphant America was rolled towards Nelson's Gift, behind one of the brown cobs, seated beside her mistress with the jewel of the world upon her proud knees.

As they sped along over the familiar road her heart grew ever lighter and lighter, just as Phoebe's grew heavier and heavier, for was she not about to recount her wondrous adventures to an admiring and envious clan? Ever heavier and heavier grew Phoebe's, until, when they came to the ford of the Green-Flower, where she had looked up that April day and seen Richard sitting on Borak at the top of the hill,—her whole breast seemed filled with lead. And when they passed through the gate of Hollybrook Wood, and the little temple of Venus glinted through the trees,—so great a sense of shame and misery overcame her that it was all she could do to keep back a

moan of pain. With fixed eyes and set lips she drove on to the front door.

Mr. Nelson had been prevented from being at World's-End to greet her and his little granddaughter on their homecoming because of one of his usual autumn attacks of influenza. A letter to that effect from her Aunt Charlotte, who now lived with him, had been awaiting Phoebe in New York, so that she was not unduly disappointed, but it had seemed long until the next day, when she could show him her new treasure and kiss his dear criss-cross wrinkled face again. Now all her joy was poisoned by those terrible voices of inanimate things which call louder than cannon in the ears of guilt. "Here . . . here it was . . ." cried the little temple, the leaves, the flowers, the very blades of grass as she passed them with the sweet, rosy fruit of that dark hour shining beside her. There came back to her the old familiar words of the man in the Bible who beat his breast, not daring to look up, and cried, "God be merciful to me, a sinner."—And then rushed over her the thought of how very merciful He had been. "I have been a wretched, ungrateful creature," she thought now, staring at the home which was forever desecrated for her. "He has saved me from my sin, and I have not thanked Him in any way as I ought to have done. I will begin from this hour, from this moment. . . if He will only show me how. . . ."

"Confess ye your faults one to another . . ." came the instant whisper from within.

"No, no, no," urged a second voice, "that would be the crowning act of selfishness—to ease your own soul at the expense of his happiness."

Which voice was the voice of truth? . Which? . . . Which? . . . White and shaken, she drew up the gaily dancing "Jinko" at the door of her girlhood's home.

They were all there to greet her, having spied the phaeton from the moment that it left Hollybrook Wood;—her father,—wrapped in a greatcoat over his cashmere dressing-gown,—Aunt Charlotte, resplendent in peacock-blue,—Aunt Patty, Uncle Burrell,—Lily, pushed back to a deferential middle distance by her parents. It was such a welcome as softened even Phoebe's dumb, lonely pain.

Then America was borne off kitchenwards by her kith and kin, and Phoebe and the baby were left in the old green-panelled room with Mr. Nelson and Aunt Charlotte.

Her father looked very well, despite his influenza, she thought, as she sat on the little stool at his side in her old place, balancing Diana upon his too narrow knee. This feat was very like trying to balance a lively guinea-pig on a tight-rope.

Diana gurgled and squirmed, and "swam" desperately at her mother with both mittened hands.

"Let *me* take her, while you talk to Thomas," said Aunt Charlotte,—and, bobbing a wonderful chatelaine at Diana, she so won that midget's fearless heart that she immediately began her swimming motions in that direction with both feet as well as hands.

Phoebe resigned her gladly; she wanted so very much to have her father to herself just for a few minutes.

"I need not ask you, my precious child, whether you are happy," he said with deep emotion, so soon as Aunt Charlotte and the baby had retired to a distant window. "I need only to look at yonder sweet infant and think of your noble husband, and I am answered."

Phoebe's heart swelled. Only twice before in all her life had her father called her "his precious child." Once, when as a little thing of six she had begged him piteously to bring her dead mother back to life; once, when he had said farewell to her on her wedding-day, and now in her young motherhood. But, try as she would, she could not respond freely or talk to him as she wished to—in this place. She longed to be gone from it to World's-End, where all was new and untainted,—where at least if there was fear there was also hope. And she was radiant when he said yes, that he and Charlotte would come over next day and spend a week with her. She fondled his hand and told him of what a charming bedroom and study awaited him there, and of what a splendid library Owen had.

"Ah, father dear," . . . she pleaded, "more than a week . . . stay with me more than one stingy little week." And he patted her eager face, saying:

"We shall see. . . . We shall see . . . but an old man is always wedded to both habits and habitation, my dear."

Then Phoebe asked after her dear "Jimmy Toots" and "King Reddy" and the grey kitten, "Miggles," and the chipmunk, "Weech," and the squirrel, "Fluff-wuzz."

Mr. Nelson smiled affectionately as she told over the odd little list of names.

"Your imagination, my dear, does not trend towards euphony," he said; "indeed, I never heard of an assembly of domestic pets whether in or out of the domain of fact with such cacophanous titles."

"What does cacoph . . . what you said . . . mean, father dear?" asked Phoebe humbly. Her father was dreadfully learned, she thought. It was odd that she had not imbibed more knowledge merely from such close contact with one of its fountain-heads. But she thanked her stars that Owen did not use such very difficult words.

Mr. Nelson explained the meaning of "cacophanous" and then Phoebe went in search of the pets whose names it characterised. She really suffered between her longing to have "Jimmy Toots" with her at World's-End and her shrinking from the associations which he evoked. She decided finally to leave him to Aunt Patty's care—he seemed to have grown very much attached to her, and she to him. She would take King Reddy with her, and "Weeeh" and "Fluff-Wuzz." "Miggles" would be too unhappy on a strange hearth-rug. But, then, the dogs at World's-End might devour the others. She ended by taking only "King Reddy" back with her.

In the meantime America was making the kitchen coruscate like some jewelled grotto of the Arabian Nights with her scintillating anecdotes of foreign splendours.

"Yes, *Ma'am,*" said she in response to a wondering comment from Aunt Patty, "we is flew high, Miss Phoebe, and me, I kin tell you! Why dee Queen tuk seeh a shine to Miss Phoebe dey wa'nt no partin' 'em. She uster take Miss Phoebe by dee elber, same's I'se a-holdin' you now, an' she says, says she: 'Phoeb, sweetie . . . ' (she called her Phoeb for short, jes' to show how sot she was on her, —an' 'sweetie' is what dey says over dere like we-all says 'honey' over hyuh.) 'Phoeb, sweetie,' says dee Queen, 'le's we-all go play by we se'ves.' An' I tell *you*, dee Queen of England an' my Miss Phoebe, dey'd jes' hunch up by dey-se'ves a-gigglin' an' a-swappin' secrets by de *day!*"

Aunt Patty and the whole clanjamfry of shaded kinsfolk (some twenty in all) sat awestricken and delighted. Then Aunt Patty found her breath.

"Well, dee ways uv Gawd is sho' parst guessin' out," said she, "to think uv Him wid all his knowledge of human natur pickin' out a sassy wench like you to go buttin'

up wid Queens an' sich. Ef you was spiled *befo',* I reckon we'll hev to put bar'l hoops round you *now* jes to hol' you together."

America bridled and helped herself to more gingerbread from the huge platter served in honour of her return from foreign parts. She stuck out her pointed, brown little finger, as perfect as a monkey's, and the circle of garnets and rhine-stones which adorned it twinkled in the kitchen fire-light.

"Did dat Queen war her crown all dee time, or a hat sometimes?" asked Uncle Burrell.

"She war dat crown *all* dee time," said America loftily. "She wan't a-goin' to be a Queen fuh nothin'. When she want to go out she jes' had her maid baste a piece o' silk in dee top, an' she war h'it jes' dee same es a hat."

"Glory be! Dat is sho' eu'yous," said Uncle Burrell.

"But dat ain't all," continued America, assisting the gingerbread in its sticky course downward by an affected series of sips from her mug of cider, "talkin' 'bout crowns, —one day when Miss Phoebe had to go to a party in a herry (hurry) an' I done forget her teerarry . . . she sho' did scold me supp'n scand'lous fur fergitten' dat teerarry. . . . " (America was a most artistic liar.)

"What am a 'teerarry'?" asked Aunt Patty. "Ef you'se goin' to show off wid outlandish words you'se got tuh 'splain 'em."

"'Teerarry,'" said America, who was enjoying herself as never before in her whole career, "'teerarry' is dee name for dee sorter second-hand crowns what folkses kin war what ain't queens."

"Uph!" said Aunt Patty. "I wonder at *my* Miss Phoebe . . . (eaze I tells you right now you'se gotter quit callin' her *yo'* Miss Phoebe tuh *me,* you sassy piece) . . . I does wonder at her bein' willin' to war even a *crown* what's second han'."

"Well, dat's only my way o' talkin'," America hastened to correct this false impression, "eaze dat 'teerarry' uv Miss Phoebe's is only less'n dee Queen's by reason it ain't got no p'ints to it. It costed . . . " she thought rapidly, " . . . it costed fifty thousand dollars in gole. . . . "

"*Now* you lyin'!" said Aunt Patty calmly.

"No, I ain't," said America, in no wise offended. "*I seed de bill.*"

"Dat's anurrer," said Aunt Patty.

"Hyuh, 'ooman, let dee gal git on wid her arrikdote," put in Uncle Burrell. "What happened when you done fergit Miss Phoebe's teerarry wid yo' laziness?"

"Shucks!" said America good-naturedly superior, "*laziness* ain't my fault, Unc' Burrell. High speritedness is *my* fault!"

"Well—tell yo' tale and hysh 'bout yo'self," grunted the old man. "Go on 'bout Miss Phoebe an' dee party."

"Wellum," said America, drawing in her breath with a little whistle through the gap in her teeth, "when dee Queen uv Englan' seed as how Miss Phoebe ain't got no teerarry to war—she jes' ups an' says: 'Phoeb, sweetie,' says she, 'I don't care 'bout his hyuh ole party nohow,' she says. 'Dee King an' dee Ambuzzards dey jes' wars my life out a'makin' me dress up fuh parties in my ermines and jools all de time. I'se jes' nach'lly sick tuh my stummick uv parties,' she says. 'Hyuh,' she says, a-rippin' dee crown uv England off'n her hade (head), '*you* war *my* crown,' says she. 'Gawd, *He* knows I'm glad tuh get shet uv it fuh *one* evenin' anyhow!' Now *dat,*" wound up America, "is dee Gawspel trufe!"

Aunt Charlotte, who of course accompanied Mr. Nelson on his visit to World's-End, was another thorn in Sally's already festering side. She was probably one of the most unique old ladies then living, and had Sally's sense of humour been keener, and her mood less bitter, might have afforded her much refreshment.

Owen told Phoebe, after he had listened twenty minutes to the old dame's twittering garrulity, that he considered that they (Owen and Phoebe) had the two most unparalleled aunts in the universe.

Miss Talliaferro (she was the aunt of Phoebe's mother) —was at least ninety-eight. Her figure combined the plumpness of the wren with the elegance of the cat-bird. Her still abundant hair, of a soft, floury yellow-grey, she wore parted and dressed in early Victorian ringlets. Her features, which clustered close together in a long, oval face, were of the precisely pretty type characteristic of the steel engravings of "fancy portraits" in the twenties.

Her manner of speech was as unique as her appearance. She called "James" "Jeems," "yellow" "yaller," and spoke of a "dish of tay" for a cup of tea. Her occupa-

tion during moments of social idleness consisted of "knotting" or "netting"—(she used either term impartially) and it was charming to see her sitting in a low chair, her pretty old legs—(they had been called like Fanny Elssler's she always told you in due time) crossed daintily, while in the mesh of scarlet silk her charming old feet, in their bronze slippers, looked like burnished beetles caught in some gaudy spider-web.

She used an English prayer-book and considered the amendations in the American issue both stupid and sacrilegious. As regarded politics, she said that she was a "Loyalist," meaning that she was by sentiment still a loyal colonist of England, and she called the father of her country "that interloper."

When unchecked she would recount the past triumphs of her personal charms by the hour, and would wind up by reciting a long,—a thirty-verse-long poem that had once been inscribed to her by an ardent admirer and which was pasted in the back of her Bible. It began,

> "Charlotte!—to praise thee,—charms like thine,
> Would take an abler pen than mine,
> Since thy fair sex requires from ours,
> A tribute of immortal powers."

It may be imagined with what emotions Sally regarded Phoebe's great-aunt.

"Ah, do let's have tea in the nursery," pleaded Mary the next afternoon, when the old gentleman and lady arrived from Nelson's Gift. "It is so gay and cheerful there, and Giles says we can't have the baby down stairs today as she's got a 'smitch of cold,'—whatever that is."

"Yes, that will be *so* nice!" cried Phoebe,—then caught herself up and turned to Sally. "If Cousin Sally wouldn't mind?" she added timidly. Try as she would she could not keep this little timid note out of her voice when she addressed Sally.

Sally lifted one eyebrow slightly.

"Why on earth should I mind?" she asked in quite a pleasant voice,—but as she spoke she looked full at Phoebe, which she seldom did, and her eyes were not pleasant. The girl changed colour.

Jonathan, who had already brought in the old Sheffield tea-tray and set it on a table near Sally, stood waiting. Everyone looked at her. She played with her rings, gaz-

ing absently into the fire. Owen was out somewhere on the farm with Downer. Suddenly Sally glanced up again. She looked from one to the other with a faint expression of surprise.

"Well . . . ?" she said, "what are we waiting for? The tea will get spoilt."

"Won't you . . . " began Phoebe. She hesitated, colouring painfully, and glanced from Sally to Jonathan.

"Surely," said Sally, giving her voice a tone of pleasantry, "you are not playing bride still and waiting for your sister-in-law to give orders in your own house?"

The others felt the unhappy jar of this without seeing exactly why they felt it. They stirred uncomfortably, and just here Owen came in.

He greeted Mr. Nelson and Miss Talliaferro warmly.

"Tea?—Jolly!" he exclaimed. Something in the atmosphere struck him. "Why aren't you having tea?" he asked. "That kettle will boil over in another second."

"We . . . we . . . were thinking of having it in the nursery," said Phoebe in the low voice that he knew. He glanced sharply at Sally. She was smiling slightly. He thought he understood.

"Take the tray up to the nursery, Jonathan," he said. "Come along all. I'm very keen for my tea. But if little Di tries to climb up my legs an usual she'll get scratched, I'm afraid. I'm bristling with Spanish-needles and what Mary in her refinement calls 'leggar's-bice.'" He gave his arm to Mr. Nelson to help him up the stairs. Aunt Charlotte skipped in front like an aged lamb—not a sheep by any means.

Last evening at dinner Phoebe had wanted Sally to keep her place at the head of the table, and Sally had loftily and rather cuttingly declined with a few curt words. Owen had felt impelled to say: "Sally is perfectly right, dear. Don't fuss. . . . " Phoebe's lip had trembled, but she had quietly done as he wished. The dark blaze kindled in Sally's eyes by his words had burned fiercely all through the meal. "Stupid . . . tiresome of her to a degree . . . and cruelly unkind," Owen had thought, with all a man's helpless irritation over the petty internecine wars of women. But Phoebe must be led to show more "spunk." Hadn't she the solid phalanx of his love and support behind her? Now he felt that again there had arisen some silly household issue. The question of who was

to give Jonathan his orders probably. Phoebe must learn to take her place as mistress. Sally was all nettles. A timid touch covered one with blisters. All very well, but how to teach Phoebe to grasp those nettles fearlessly? He turned it over and over in his mind all the way up stairs, while outwardly responding to Mr. Nelson's cadeneed remarks.

The nursery certainly looked a joyous place as Jonathan held back the door for them to enter. The huge fire of hickory and apple-prunings, built on the altar of Diana's "smitch of cold," danced with an effect of gay laughter over the happy chintz and the glasses of the pictures. Each window was a curtain of rippled gold from the blowing leaves outside. The tea-table had been set on one side of the blazing fire, and Giles was restraining the baby by the tail of her white frock from laying siege to the silver that glittered so alluringly in that mysterious upper world represented by the tops of tables and the seats of chairs.

"Ba-ba-ba-ba," clamoured Diana, whose cold in the head changed her favourite word despite her, and then she sneezed so charmingly and looked so quaintly astonished that Mary rushed over and caught her up in her arms, while Giles "blew" her bud of a nose for her with learned skill.

"Ba-ba-ba-ba," called Diana, and "swam" towards her mother, pressing her little stomach against Mary's shoulder with all her might. "Ba-ba-ba-ba . . . " she went on wailing until Phoebe took her and cuddled her close against her breast.

"Ah," said Mr. Nelson, leaning back in a big half-way-house chair, like the one at Nelson's Gift, and pleasantly soothed by the hot cup of camomile tea which Phoebe had made for him from the baby's stores. "Now *that*, I grant you, is a congenial subject for a picture—the young mother and her babe. How much happier a combination than a maiden with a crow. Mr. Bryce should paint you thus, my dear. Do you not agree with me, Owen?"

Phoebe's face was hidden against the baby's hair.

Sally, apparently looking into the fire, watched her as the cat watches the mouse on which another cat has pounced. Owen said:

"I don't think my nephew could ever paint a really good portrait of Phoebe. She hasn't the type that he understands."

Sally slipped in:

"You think Boldini, perhaps, would do it better?"

Owen looked at her.

"No," he said, "Boldini is too obviously and cleverly sensual. I wonder why you suggested him?"

"It occurred to me that he could make a very striking picture of her."

"And so he could of you, or of me," said her brother. "I think you would be amazed to find what a vivid thing he would make of you, Sally."

"Meaning that I . . . ?" she said in a low voice.

"Sometimes," he said quietly, in the same pitch.

Mary, on her knees beside the low chair in which Phoebe sat, was scrutinising adoringly the little face which peeped out from under its crocus-coloured floss of hair. Diana had got hold of her mother's hand and was luxuriously munching the rings, so charmingly cool to her feverish gums. Two little teeth, like the dwarf petals of an ox-eye daisy, were already through.

"I'm staring at you, you precious," said Mary to the baby, kissing one of her little bronze shoes, "to see whether you're *all* your mother, or *some* your father. What do you think yourself, Phoebe?—She's absurdly like you, but don't you think there's something, just a wee something about her forehead and the way her hair grows that reminds one of Owen? What do you think, Sally?"

"I don't think she's at all like her father," said Sally in a peculiar voice.

"Nor I," said Owen. "She is Phoebe and Phoebe only from top to toe. That's why I'm so very partial to her. Just push back that down she calls hair, Mary,—and you'll see the little widow's peak that seals her Phoebe's—wholly."

Mary did so. The little face had a singularly winning, innocent look with the soft hair thus strained back from it. The violet eyes were like two flowers suddenly stripped of their shading foliage.

"Oh, you *precious!*" cried Mary, and kissed the tiny "widow's peak."

Everyone looked on with smiles but Sally. She looked on too, but her expression was one of sombre brooding. Owen felt that a sharp physical illness would be preferable to this chronic sick anger against Sally which was gathering in his heart, and of which he could give no direct

sign. He went over suddenly and held out his big hand to the baby. Instantly she put out her little curved arms, which as yet seemed to have nothing in them so grim as bones. Her face was one shine of glee, the two little daisy-petals showed like drops of milk in her pink mouth.

"How she dotes on her daddy!" laughed Mary.

"It seems to be reciprocal," said Sally.

The baby was lying back, chuckling with pleasure, in the hammock made by the big arms. She had got hold of his tie and jerked it rythmically.

Something that she could no more control than the beating of her heart urged Sally on.

"Do you love the child because you're its father, or do you think you would love it in any case?" she asked him.

"I love it because it's Phoebe's," he said. "Except for inconvenient conventions, I should love it in that case, no matter who happened to be its father."

Phoebe's heart seemed to open wide, letting forth all the blood in her body at one hot gush; then to shut so that she felt suffocating. She bent forward, and began to gather up the scattered toys that lay about her chair. Owen was thinking that for the first time in his life he understood how men sometimes beat women with staves.

Sally went further. It was just as though some perverse demon were at her elbow, jogging it, jogging it. She smiled her slightly one-sided smile and said to Phoebe:

"You have a very complacent husband, my dear Phoebe."

Then Owen looked directly at her, and, though he was smiling too, there was something in this smile which gave Sally a queer "turn."

"Yes. I'm a very uxorious husband indeed. I remind myself of the Biblical saying—it were better for a man to have a millstone hanged about his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea, than to offend one of these little ones—meaning of course, Phoebe and Diana in my hopeless case."

Everyone laughed at this shamelessly familiar sentiment from one who had been so long a bachelor,—everyone, that is, except Sally. She felt somehow chilled by a vague, sinister warning. She tried to search his face covertly for some deeper meaning than had been expressed by his words, but vainly. He had given the baby back to Phoebe, and was engaging Aunt Charlotte in conversation.

Phoebe drew her chair near her father's, and Mary followed, a still unsatiated baby-worshipper.

Sally sat with one of her thin, beautifully arched feet, in its well-made brown shoe, on the fender, and stared into the fire through the folds of the handkerchief she held up to shield her face.

Feeling, from observation of her costume, that Miss Talliaferro would relish a compliment on her attire, Owen had begun by saying that it was delightful to meet a wonderful person who managed to look girlish at ninety; (for Phoebe had told him that her great-aunt was overweeningly proud of her extreme age). And that heliotrope was a marvellously becoming shade to such blonde hair and complexion.

The old lady bridled, adjusting her stole of imitation ermine, which she had slipped back on entering the warm nursery.

"Ninety-eight, me good sir, ninety-eight," she corrected. "Me next birthday falls in April. As Mr. Mortimer Smith used to say, the spring conducted me to this world, and I would leave it bearing the spring with me. Mortimer Smith was a gallant gentleman in his day—and exceedingly gifted. He would have been an eminent public writer had he lacked other means of subsistence. I recall some lines he writ me which run thus:

> "Thy damask cheek, alike so free,
> From vile Shakespearean worm and me,
> That 'brier rose sans briers,'—alas!
> Hath brought fond me to this sad pass."

"Ah, *now* she's off!" whispered Mary to Phoebe.

A rattling scratch and a series of snuffling sneezes at the crack of the threshold told that Wizzy was without, craving admission to the presence of the god of his idolatry.

"Oh, aren't you afraid for the baby?" asked Mary nervously, as Owen went to admit him. But she was assured that Wizzy had overcome the first pangs of jealousy and even allowed the baby to make free with his ears, if she did not tug *too* hard. So he came in making a joyous, wriggling letter "S" of himself, and Mary was shown how meekly he sat while Diana "poored" his sleek little head, which he turned sheepishly aside with dejected eyes looking from their tearful corners at Owen.

Shortly after the baby's reception broke up, and Phoebe

went with her father and Aunt Charlotte to show them their rooms.

Running back, about ten minutes later to look for Aunt Charlotte's "*face-à-main,*" which she thought she must have dropped in the nursery, Mary was surprised to find Sally there alone with little Diana. The baby was seated on a white fur rug, hammering with one of her little bronze shoes upon the floor, and Sally, chin on hand in a low chair, was regarding her with the fiercely confused expression of a she-wolf looking at the child that it has not yet decided whether to adopt or devour.

Sally started as Mary spoke, and that dark flush settled on her cheek-bones.

"The nurse had to go downstairs for something, and I said I would stay here till she returned. I came back to look for my handkerchief."

Mary smiled and nodded from the white rug on which she had swooped down beside the baby. "Poor Sally!" she thought, "how queer she is! Fancy making excuses for wanting to see more of such a duck of an only niece!"

"Isn't she the angelest thing?" she laughed, tickling the baby, who chuckled wildly and said "Pr-r-r-r-rr!" through a series of bubbles.

"Mary . . . " said Sally,—(she could not help it any more than Dostoievsky's hero could help circling closer and closer about the flame of justice which was to burn him to a crisp) . . . "Mary . . . I know the child has Phoebe's colouring,—and you said you saw something like Owen in her—but,—look at her in this light,—from this angle." (Mary leaned nearer to Sally.) "There! just that view —don't you think she looks like Richard, too?"

Mary shook her head.

"I really can't see the slightest hint of a likeness to Richard, Sally."

"Well.—I do," said Sally shortly.

Here Giles came back and both ladies left the nursery.

XXXVI

IT seemed to Owen, that had it not been for the cruel hatred that he felt stealing from Sally's bitter heart and clouding all the air as with a fine, poisonous dust that must be drawn in with every breath,—it seemed to him

that, but for this,—these autumn days at World's-End would have been the happiest that he had ever known. For, with that sure, intuitive reading of Phoebe which had been his from the first, he saw the struggle within her, and was sure that before long she would confess all to him. That one cloud dispelled by full forgiveness, their life together would have a serene beauty of which he had sometimes dreamed, but never thought to experience. It was, as he felt, a wonderful period of renewal for Phoebe as well as for himself. As always, he had that Anchises-like sense of regeneration from contact with the soil of his old home, and now that the child had come and taken her individual place in their lives, he no longer thought of her as Richard's child, but as Phoebe's. She was as like her mother as one clear rose to another, nor was there any trace of other parentage in line or tint or gesture. Marvellously, miraculously it seemed to him sometimes, was she all her mother. The little hands had the same gestures, the little feet sprang from the round ankles in just the same way; her eyes were Phoebe's own, her hair, even the little mouth curving out from the centre, carved up at the corners, was Phoebe's mouth. As for her bud of a nose, it would be in time what shape it pleased God to make it. His feelings towards this child gave Owen that quaint sensation of gratitude to himself,—to that part of himself not familiarly realised,—which we feel when we find suddenly that we are not cowards, or ingrates, or utter egoists, or of the breed of Caliban. He had feared that the strong animal in him would hate the child, and he found that there was part of him which was just as instinctive as the animal and even stronger,—and which, without ado or wrestlings, accepted the fact of Phoebe's motherhood as, in itself, a sacred thing, and which looked on her child as an independent being, and not as the offspring of baseness and treachery.

He would not have been human or a man had he not suffered some deadly throes in facing the thought that his first-born could never be Phoebe's first-born also, nor all his love for her wipe out the dark fact of her child's parentage. But for the child, itself, he felt only tenderness. Ever since the tiny hand had clung to his on the day of its birth he had felt nothing for it but an immense pity,—the sort of feeling that moved him to care for poor "Wizzy" more than for self-sufficing "Rab" and "Bran,"

—and that led him to refrain from shooting the free things of air and wood. And musing on his feeling for this baby, which would have seemed so unnatural to most men, he recalled a dream which had haunted him ever since the day that as a boy of fourteen he went quail shooting with his father. This dream was that he wounded a bird which fluttered along a hedge,—fluttered, fluttered, piteously cheeping. He would follow trying to find it and put it out of its pain. A long time he would hunt for it among the thick twigs of the hedge in vain. Then suddenly he would come upon it, but lo! when he had it in his hands, it was a little, wounded child that he held and so deep and painful would be his feeling of pity that he would wake up with cold sweat on his forehead. Yes, it seemed to him that this little daughter of Phoebe's was like the little child of his dream,—something so touchingly helpless and defenceless, that his heart stirred just for looking on her. And as he looked at her sometimes now, so gay and confidently joyous, tossed from hand to hand by her little band of worshippers,—he would think: "And if Sally had had her way she might now be one of hundreds of forlorn little foundlings. A poor little bastard flung like a crumb into the maw of chance."

——And savagely, and right humanly, he mused, with grim pleasure, on the picture of Richard face to face some day with the fruit of his ruthlessness,—with the little unconscious, fairy, flitter-mouse thing, who, for all her delicate beauty, was to be in his life a Frankenstein, absorbing all that he had counted on, coming between him and every coveted good thing of this life.

Almost, when this picture rose before him—almost but never quite,—he overlooked the horror of what it would mean to Phoebe, and through her to him.

As for Phoebe, but for that dark struggle in her heart, and Sally's cruelty, and the cold fear that touched her softly, now and then, in happiest moments, as with the cold hand of some little, patient ape, waiting in the shadows for its share of the feast,—she would have thought herself in a sweet, homely heaven, fashioned perhaps by some Martha-like angel, who knew the hearts of women and their cravings for the dear, familiar ecstasies of earth. But always, when almost she had forgotten,—in the most untoward moments,—while walking with the man that she "worshipped as she ought to worship God," through the

golden October woods, or riding with him over the blue mountain passes, or resting with her hand in his by the fireside while he read aloud to her, or even when she lay in that ivory-coloured love-bed with her head upon his arm,—softly, gently, almost timidly, that chill hand of the little ape of fear would steal plucking, plucking at her garment of joy, at her heart-strings,—the little clammy hand that teased cringingly as if for food.

But, in spite of this, much pure, wholesome joy came her way, and she grasped it thankfully, "lifting up her heart in both hands" as the old seer says,—holding it high, where the little ape-hand could not touch it. These were her simple joys of every day, which no man could take from her, which even the uncertain future could not embitter in the memory, if the gods themselves decided to reclaim them and leave her desolate one day.

These, her hours of companionship in his work, were, perhaps, the most precious of all to her. She was not merely the cherished woman when she went with him about the farm or read his manuscripts aloud that he might the better correct their faults. No,—when she entered into his plans about the schools, their re-organisation, the selection of teachers, the planning of new methods,—when she began to understand his ideas and their application; when she went with him among the labourers and their families, and took up her own part in the friendship and good-fellowship which existed at World's-End between employer and employed; when she began to comprehend some of the fascinating and world-old mastery of the tilling of the soil,—some of that awed pleasure, as of one participating in a tranquil miracle, which comes to those who watch the evolution of seed into grain, "some twenty, some an hundred fold,"—and the magic burgeoning of sweet fruit from the bitter rind of trees,—when she heard the manager counting as simply on his coming flock of winter lambs and the advent of foals and calves and piglings in due season as he did on his future crop of oats and wheat and maize,—when all this sweet, strong, primeval life began to enfold and mingle with her separate life, and when she realised his part in it, and responsibility towards it, and that she was allowed to share this interest and responsibility, it seemed to her as though some sacrifice of herself were needed by herself to express fittingly the deep, grateful joy that brimmed her heart.

And over and over, over and over she would ask herself: "If I told him all would that be a great enough offering? If I told him everything, would he forgive me, and love me perhaps more for being utterly honest with him?—Or would I break his heart just to ease my own? But, then, even if he forgave me he could never forget. Every time he looked at the child. . . . " She would always break off shuddering at this point, for the little, clammy hand would creep out and touch her softly, slyly. . . . "No!" her racked heart would cry—"God made me. He knows I cannot. He that made me knows it isn't in me to do it . . . I can't . . . I can't! . . ."

And for Sally, too, these days held emotions strangely mixed of pain, of wrath, of jealousy, of bitterness, of savage tenderness. She thought to feel an untempered hatred for the child that had come between Richard and all her hopes for him. And yet,—though it was so like Phoebe, though violet eyes instead of dusky black ones gazed up at her from its small face,—yet there was something,—a hint, a faint, elusive look now and then,—which recalled what Richard had been when she held him to her breast in the fierce rapture of her sensual maternity. And this likeness left her no peace. What was of Phoebe in the child she loathed, but what she sensed of Richard in it drew her as with "hooks of steel."

This inner struggle made her coldly repellant in her manner to the baby. She had never taken it in her arms since that first day when Mary ran up the front steps and thrust it on her. But sometimes she ached to do so, and the more hungry her longing, the harsher was the coldness of her voice and look.

Giles one day, quite out of patience with this unnatural relative of so supremely delectable a baby, had broken from her customary shell of reserve and expressed herself in forcible terms to Phoebe.

"If you'll pardon me, m'm, I can't abide Mrs. Bryce coming to the nursery. She do have that sour an expression I fear, sometimes, 'twill curdle the milk in the poor child's stommick. A fiercer looking lady, begging your pardon, m'm—what with these jetty brows and that p'inted nose,—I pray I may never be'old more. W'y do she come, m'm, if 'tis only to gaze so grim-like at the precious pet?"

"Poor Mrs. Bryce isn't at all well, you know, Giles,"

Phoebe had answered, "she has some dreadful trouble with her heart. We must feel sorry for her, not vexed with her."

"If you'll pardon me, m'm," Giles had retorted, "the trouble with her heart is that 'tis a main unkind one. Many folks has that trouble, m'm, as lives to a green old age. But all I says, m'm, is that I wishes earnest she wouldn't set her foot more in this nursery."

"But Giles, she comes so seldom."

"'Seldom,' say you! Begging your pardon, m'm, that only shows what secret, hid ways she 'as of be'aving. 'Seldom!'——W'y it's all hours she do be a-stepping in,—soft-foot as a cat, asking your pardon, m'm. Sometimes she do but turn about the room, just touching the toys, maybe, with them long, hard fingers. Then, again, she'll sit and browse in yonder chair for nigh an hour,—with them dull, black eyes fixed on the dear lamb as if she was overlookin' her. I tell you, m'm, 'tis not wholesome for a babe to be eyed like it was a newt or a toad."

Phoebe felt worried, she could not tell why exactly. "Has she been in today, Giles?"

"That she 'as, m'm. I was all in a tirrit w'en she went out. Silence and dark looks is an ill combination, m'm."

"Does she ever hold the baby?"

"Not she!—She but sits and glowers at it like."

"Doesn't she ever talk with you, Giles?"

"Oh, ay!—Sometimes she'll put the ancient question I be that sick of—'And how do ye like Virginia?' or that other nigh as wearing: 'And were ye not afraid of the black folk at first?' Or she'll ask me how many teeth the baby has now. Yes, m'm, she'll ask me that the very day after I've told her twice as how the last one have just prieked through. 'Tis trying, 'tis sore trying, m'm. I do wish humbly as I might be saved from it."

"I'm sorry, but I don't see what I can do, Giles. She is Mr. Randolph's sister, you know, and I wouldn't hurt her feelings for anything."

"Well, m'm, of course you know best. But the Master is not always so soft with her. Five or six is the smart raps I've seen him give her in this very room. Not being in their confidence, begging your pardon, m'm, I 'ad no key to the 'idden meaning of his words,—but I could see that each one 'it 'ome. And I confess, m'm, 'twas a great pleasure to me, w'ich of course it 'adn't ought to be, but

then, m'm, we're all 'uman, queen as well as kitchen-maid. And of course, as 'tis past mending, I must just bear it as I may. But when the Madam goes on a visit per'aps, or somew'ere for her health, Martha Giles will not 'urt herself with weeping."

Phoebe recounted this conversation to Owen, saying rather timidly when she ended:

"Don't you think, perhaps, that it would be a good thing if I went away somewhere just for a little while, and took the baby with me? Mary would come, too, I know. You see, it must be *so* hard on poor Cousin Sally, having me here in her place, and the baby makes it worse somehow. Don't you think that would be a good plan?"

They were standing before the fire in her bedroom when Phoebe said this, and Owen sat down on the big lounge and drew her down beside him before he answered. Then, with his arm about her, he said: "Upon my word, you suggest deserting me as coolly as you would suggest a walk. Are you so sure of *my* coolness?"

Phoebe bent her head, turning and re-turning the wedding ring on the brown hand that held her waist,—the ring which Mary had once wondered whether he would wear. He held her a little closer, then bent and looked into her shy face teasingly. "So you really want to divorce yourself from my 'bed and board,' just because Sally is a crank?"

"No—no, Owen. . . . "

"'No—no'? Then why did you suggest such a harsh possibility?—Don't you know. . . . " He held her to him with sudden passion. "Don't you know that I am a hopeless ass about leaving you even for twenty-four hours on business?"

"I . . . I. . . . "

"'I . . . I. . . . ' Guilt makes you stammer. A guilty conscience. . . . You are tired of me and you make poor Sally the excuse."

"Oh, don't, don't say it! . . . even in fun . . . " she pleaded, and he heard tears in her voice. He grasped her suddenly and set her upon his knee, where he could see her face.

"Phoebe," he said,—his voice shook—"Phoebe,—how much do you love me? . . . Do you really love me? Am I first?"

She flung herself against his breast.

"Oh, you know . . . you know . . . " she whispered, "first, last, best, all,—more than anyone ever loved anyone,—more than I ought,—more than God wants me to. . . . " She turned up her mouth to his. "I can't speak it . . . " she whispered, almost sobbing. "Kiss me . . . kiss me, and *feel* it."

Through that long kiss they heard the flutter of the wood fire, the ticking of the little travelling clock, the beating of their own quickened hearts. Long, long minutes seemed to flow by, all gold with passion. Phoebe wished that she might die before that long kiss ended, and the little ape-hand touched her chilly again.

But. with Owen, the fruit of this conversation was not only that exquisite kiss of married lovers. He thought that he saw a door of escape opening from the situation which tried him almost to the snapping point sometimes.

If Sally grew to love the child that would solve several problems. In that case she would unconsciously take the child's part against fate, even against Richard as far as lesser matters went. She would stop goading Phoebe with that two-edged tongue of hers, in what she thought was her secret garden of cruelty. She would resign herself more or less philosophically to a position which allowed her to be near the child. And he determined to help her break through the obstinacy of prejudice which he felt instinctively was all that held her back from that lovely little being, who, after all, was compact of her own flesh and blood.

His opportunity came two days later when Mary and Phoebe had set off on a gay expedition after chestnuts, taking America and two of Aunt Polly's grandchildren with them. The very names of these twin pickaninnies set them off in gales of laughter. One, the little girl, was called Buena Vista, and the other, a boy, Buenos Ayres. Owen, from his study, where he and Downer were working out the problem of the autumn sale and packing of the World's-End apples, smiled as he heard Mary's little staccato rill of mirth mingling with Phoebe's girlish "ha-ha-ha." He knew that Sally, who did not feel strong that day, was lying on the sofa in the library with a book for company. As soon as he had finished with Downer he went up to the nursery. Little Diana had just come in from her afternoon walk (the "smitch of cold" had long since

disappeared), and Giles was "hulling" her of white coat and leggings and mittens as though she were a rosy little fruit with a white rind.

"Will you come with Owen, Dido?" he asked, holding out the big hands that always delighted her. She simply flung herself into them.

"Very fond of her dear dada she is, to be sure," smiled Giles. "There's no one she goes to so willing as she does to you, sir; excepting, of course, the mistress."

"Her ladyship knows that my big arms make a monstrously 'comfy' throne for her."

" 'Er little 'ighness it ought to be, sir, asking your pardon, but she 'ave got such denty, winsome ways with her, the love!"

Owen took Diana off while Giles went to Hannah's room for a cup of tea, and told her "it was the beautifullest sight as ever was, to see such a fine, splendid gentleman a-bearing that sweet mite as you might say a bough bears a blossom. That was the only sense in marriage, so it was, the blessed hinfants. And for her part it did seem a hard dispensation of Providence as it should take two to make 'em. Many a woman craved the comfort of a child that wouldn't be worritted along of a man."

Owen went to the library, and paused in the doorway, seemingly surprised to find Sally on the sofa.

"Do come in . . . and shut the door," she said rather pettishly, "there's a dreadful draught."

"Shan't we be disturbing you?" he objeeted.

"Not at all . . . not at all . . . I can eoneentrate my mind perfectly with any amount of noise going on."

"Di isn't a very noisy baby," he assured her gravely, feeling rather amused at her prickly reception of what he knew was a seeret pleasure. "She will find food for reflection in my watch chain and watch for the next hour."

He ensconced himself in a big leather arm-chair with the baby, while Sally returned with feverish applieation to her book.

"Blow, baby . . . blow hard," whispered Owen, holding his thumb to the spring of his watch-case.

Diana made a funny little sputtering noise, her cheeks like bubbles with her desperate effort. Open flew the watch!

"A-klee-klee-klee-klee!" chuckled she, bouncing in his grasp with delight.

This went on for several minutes. Then Sally rested her book on her knee with one eyebrow slightly lifted.

"It *is* rather difficult to keep one's attention on a serious book like this, with a baby having hysterics over a watch . . . " she admitted.

"Perhaps we'd better go," suggested Owen, half rising, "I can take her to my study. It's very warm in there."

"No—pray don't," said Sally. "To tell you the truth I was rather lonely. This keeping quiet is a hard dose for me to swallow. I'll enjoy having you to myself for a little while—if it won't bore you."

"Dear old Sally," he said affectionately, bending over Diana's little head, to squeeze her thin hand in that way he had. (The actual sight of her worn, sickly face when, as now, it was undistorted by bitter feeling always moved him.) "When did you ever bore me?—In fact, I'm vain enough to think that we've never yet bored each other."

Sally smiled—a very melancholy, proud smile it was. "Oh, semi-invalids always bore people; we derelicts are a sort of moral dumb-bells to exercise unselfishness. Look at Mary. . . . Do you think it has amused her being shut up with me all these months? That woman," she continued, her lip trembling, "is an angel. . . . "

"Ah, the angels are pallid gentry beside Mary," he assented warmly.

"Da-da-da-da," broke in Diana, tugging with both hands at the watch. "Pr-r-r-r-r-r!" she sputtered at it, covering it with tiny drops from her little wet, teething mouth.

"There!" said Owen, and the magic watch blew open.

"I think I'll go back to my book," Sally remarked drily, and took it up again. Owen noticed suddenly that it was a volume of Brieux's plays. Could she be reading "Maternité" . . . That would be an odd coincidence. . . . He wondered how Sally would relish the famous Frenchman's view of conventional chastity. Then he smiled, noticing that her eyes were fixed, not following the printed lines.

Diana suddenly twisted away from the watch, with the imperious fickleness of babyhood, and lunging forward made a snatch at M. Brieux.

"She wants to go to you, I believe," said Owen, holding

on to her little flounce-like skirt as he had seen Giles do. "But you feel too seedy to have her, don't you?"

Sally put down the book again, and he saw that the dusky red had come into her cheeks. Yes, the baby was imperatively motioning to go to her. Her little arms were stretched out, her bronze shoes beating a tattoo of impatient demand.

"Da-da-da," she cried passionately to Sally, saying plainly, in her language of intonation, "Take me! Take me! Take me at once!"

Sally frowned nervously, hesitated, then reached forward and took the little springing form. The baby sat still for a brief second upon the vicuña rug that covered her grandmother's thin knees, and gazed at her as though enraptured with the dark, gloomy face. Then, suddenly, she dived forward and planted a wide, wet, sucking kiss on Sally's chin. Her little hand went up "pooring" the sallow cheek.

"Why, it seems a case of perfect infatuation," laughed Owen.

In Sally's poor, ailing heart boiled the strangest mixture of repulsion and fierce tenderness. She felt, thus holding Richard's child, as though the full-blown rose of her maternity had shut and become a bud again. She held the baby to her, with the savage embrace that babies themselves bestow on kittens, then she set her sharply off again on the apex of her knees, lifted together under the fur rug.

"She's a little light-o'-love," she muttered in an indescribable voice. "Why should she take this sudden fancy to an unprepossessing old woman?—You're a little light-o-'-love, do you hear?" she said to the baby, and shook her slightly where she held her poised.

Hot anger filled Owen, but he sat quite still, polishing with his handkerchief the watch that Diana had bedewed.

The baby was enchanted with this shaking. She crowed and laughed joyously, kicking her bronze shoes against Sally's breast.

"Little light-o'-love. . . . Little light-o'-love . . . " said Sally again. Diana continued her gleeful bouncing and crowing.

"You like the name . . . eh?" said Sally grimly.

The baby thrust down her flossy poll and began to munch with her warm, slobbering little mouth on Sally's

rings. Those warm, munching lips thrilled the perverse, passionate woman as no lover's kiss had ever done. She coloured darkly, then suddenly she thrust her other hand under the short skirts and felt the small bare thighs, soft as rice-paper.

"This child is ridiculously dressed," she exclaimed in an angry voice. "She is insufficiently clad for this time of year. You should speak to Phoebe, or to that conceited English nurse. Did you bring her half-naked, like this, through those draughty halls?"

"The halls were quite warm," said Owen, "but I'll tell Phoebe that you think the baby had better have warmer things on."

"For heaven's sake, Owen," she said sharply, "don't mention *me* in the matter! . . . A meddlesome. . . ." She had almost said "grandmother." Her heart gave a dreadful, hot stab. She pretended that she had choked; coughed two or three times, and went on. "A meddlesome sister-in-law is the most unbearable of family afflictions. Just speak to that English hop-pole yourself."

"Very well, . . . I will," said Owen.

He told himself that he was looking on at a drama which made the great plays now lying on the floor by the sofa seem hackneyed. And he wondered at the dual sense in men which could permit him such a thought at such a moment. Just here Jonathan came in and said that Mr. Downer would like to see the master again.

"Shall I take her with me?" asked Owen of Sally, "or would you mind keeping her till I come back? I shan't be gone long."

"I'll keep her," said Sally ungraciously.

Owen went out with Jonathan.

For the first time Sally was alone with her grandchild in her arms. She lay perfectly still, while Diana, absorbed, tried to pluck the little silver buttons from her grey crêpe blouse, as though they had been some sort of berries. Then all at once, sitting up among the heaped cushions, Sally caught the baby to her, pressing against her thin breast, withered by the milk that had so long since ebbed from it, . . . the shining head, the little stomach in its cuirass of embroidery, the soft dimpled arms and firm, energetic legs. Into a sort of living bundle of sweetness she crumpled the child as though she would crush it with savage tenderness to a compass small enough to be covered

by one passionate kiss. And from head to feet she caressed it with her dry, burning lips, the little head, the little stomach, the little knees, the little feet, the little hands.

The baby found these tickling caresses delightful. She squirmed and chuckled with pleasure, seizing in either hand black-and-grey locks of the head that darted over her with the swiftness of a feeding bird. And she tugged until the tears came to Sally's eyes, bracing her little back against her grandmother's bony arm, and pressing with both feet against her body.

When Owen returned some twenty minutes later Sally was leaning back again among the cushions, and on her breast, its pink mouth making a little ring of coral about the root of its small thumb, the baby lay fast asleep.

"I'll take her now," he said, bending over.

But she answered quickly:

"No. It's very bad for a child to be waked out of a sound sleep. I'll carry her to the nursery myself."

"But won't that be too much exertion for you?" he objected.

She smiled enigmatically.

"My heart can support a greater strain than carrying a baby up an easy flight of stairs," she said.

And she took the child to the nursery, and laid it herself in its crib, while Owen went to look for Giles.

XXXVII

"COUSIN MARY," said Phoebe only the next day, "did you ever have a feeling as if the gods were treating you as the Aztecs used to treat the people they had selected for a sacrifice?"

"Dear child! What a doleful fancy for such a day! No. I don't think I ever felt like that. What makes you say such a thing?"

"It's just that it all seems too beautiful, too happy, too perfect, too peaceful. . . ." said Phoebe slowly. "If I had tried to imagine anything as beautiful as my life is now, I couldn't possibly have done it, Cousin Mary. Look, . . . look at it all."

She turned slowly, her hands against her breast. "Look at me, . . . in the midst of it, . . . part of it. Look," her

voice dropped, "at *him*. . . ." She lifted her soft, impassioned eyes to where Owen was standing near Wrexhill, the apple merchant, while they both regarded seriously the dark winesap which Owen was turning in his hands. "And he is *mine*. . . ." she ended in a whisper, wonder and a sort of hushed dread in her voice.

Mary flinched like one grasped upon a bruise. Then she said, also speaking in a low tone:

"I know what you mean now, dear. Love and fear always go hand in hand. It's like the great mystery of death that makes all the precious things of this life more precious."

But as she spoke she thought how love had divided her from love, far more completely than death would have done.

"Don't . . . don't . . ." pleaded Phoebe, shivering and paling in the bright sunlight, "don't speak of death. It always seems to me as if it turned and looked at us when we speak its name."

Mary smiled at her affectionately and a little sadly. "Ah, Phoebe dear," she said, "it's a wonderful thing to see a happiness so big that it scares a little mortal. That must be a sweet sort of fright. You remind me of your own baby, when I put a handkerchief over my face and then cry 'Boo!' and let her snatch it off. She has the most delicious thrills of terror—then off comes the handkerchief and lo! there's just Mary's face under it. There's just love's face under that dread of yours. So I can't pity you *too* much, dear fanciful."

"I know," said Phoebe wistfully, "it's wrong and maybe it's silly, . . . but . . . I just can't help it, Cousin Mary."

She and Mary had gone with Owen to the orchard to watch the packing of the apples. There is no rural sight more lovely than the apple harvest in Virginia on a perfect autumn day such as this. The sunlight had that joyous sparkle unknown to summer, the light October haze, dimly, dreamily blue, gauzed the woods and mountains and far horizon line, tempering the brilliant foliage from a paroquet-like gaudiness to the soft glow of stuffs from Kashmir.

Against this delicate drop-scene with which nature had set her pretty drama of the apple gatherers ran the aisles of vigorous young trees, some three thousand of them, now in their prime, all glistening with round, shaded red fruit,

or the greenish-yellow of Albemarle pippins. And these dark and pale-red and waxen-yellow balls, clustering along the drooping boughs, were magically gay and joyous against that pale-blue distant haze.

Near Mary and Phoebe stood the sorting-bin, like a tamed "gyascutus" with its long legs and short legs so adjusted that the apples slid easily from the cushion at its upper end along the slats under the hands of the sorters. And from every side, down the aisle at whose head it stood, came the gatherers with their bushel-baskets of "split-wood," fresh and white as new cut chips and brimming with the bright globes of shaded red, for in this part of the orchard nearly all the trees were wine-saps.

Ladders of white pine, pointed at the top so as to fit firmly between the smaller twigs, were placed so that the men might reach the higher fruit, but the small fry swarmed up regardless of other aid than legs and arms, and their brown and pink faces could be seen among the foliage, as with a chirp of victory they would cull Sappho's "topmost apple of all" that had escaped those on the ladders.

Men and boys for the most part wore faded blue overalls, and these oft-washed garments seemed cut from a bit of that blue-haze curtain dropped at the back of the scene.

"Phoebe dear," said Mary, after watching this charming sight for some moments in silence, "you've heard of the curiously impious expression, 'tempting Providence.' Well, . . . that is what you'll be doing if you indulge one single more gloomy thought in a scene like this."

"I'll try not to," said Phoebe, and she slipped her hand in Mary's arm and pressed close to her.

"Come over here," called Owen at this point; "Mr. Wrexhill wants to show you how apples are packed and sorted."

They went, picking their way through heaps of discarded fruit, edging gingerly between the sorting-bin and the team of big grey Clydesdales drawn up beside it.

Owen was standing with Wrexhill near Downer, who with his own hands was turning the press that fixed the barrel heads in place. And the old apple merchant, with his shrewd, clever eyes that could fix the diameter of an apple in inches and eighths without the help of a pocket-rule, showed them how the fruit was sorted into barrels of "firsts" and "seconds." Then, to prove the accuracy of

s eye, he cut an apple in two and laid his pocket-rule ross it.

"Exactly two inches and a half!" cried Phoebe and ary, with a naïve surprise that warmed the professional ckles of the old merchant's heart.

After they had watched the sorting and packing for some ne Phoebe took Mary's hand and said: "I must, I *must* up one of those lovely ladders!"

She ran off, pulling Mary with her, and Owen called ter her.

"Be careful, dear. Watch her, Mary. She's a reckless p at times."

Phoebe selected a ladder that had just been placed ainst a tree so laden with the lovely fruit that it looked e a decoration in a child's picture-book.

Grasping the sides with her strong little hands, she ounted quickly and surely, the ladder giving to her mo- ns with the pliant boughs against which it leaned.

"Take care . . . take care, darling!" called Mary from e solid earth.

A little, rapturous laugh fell down upon her. "Mary! m in fairyland! You must try it, too!"

All about her was the hollowed fret-work of the foliage, e a tent of jade in an Oriental fairy-tale, set with round rnelions. And through the twinkling leaves little slivers violet sky peeped at her, and the soft air, sweet with e smell of sun-warmed apples, caressed her face. She ucked the fruit nearest her hand, and came down again, unching it as she descended.

"It's too beautiful to keep still, Mary," she said when e stood beside her. "Let's go for a walk and tell Owen follow us when he's finished. But first I must give those ar, patient things some apples." She went over to the ydesdales and fed them wind-falls until the saliva of *urmandise* dropped from their plushy lips.

"Good-day, Mr. Wrexhill," she called; "thank you so ch for showing me the mysteries."

"You must come again day after tomorrow, ma'am," he plied, "and see us do fancy packing with the pippins baskets."

"I'll catch you up in about an hour," Owen called as ey went off in the direction of the mill. "You can ad- re the view from Logan's Peak while you wait for me."

They went to the northeast corner of the orchard and

crossed the brown mill stream by a single plank abo three feet from the ground. With country-girlish pri in their steady heads, they passed over swiftly and light Mary balancing with her arms, but Phoebe still munchi her big apple. As they went across the fields towards t road that led to Logan's Peak, their feet crushed the lit mauve-flowered stalks of pennyroyal, and its sharp fra rance rose about them.

"How I love that smell!" cried Phoebe, throwing t core of her apple at a flock of geese that rose with scol ing, discordant shrieks and settled in a little flotilla on t mill pond. "It means Virginia to me almost more th anything. Oh, Cousin Mary!" The shadow stole over h face again. "Can't you see how I feel? . . . Everythi that I love most I have so fully and all together. The go *are* jealous, Mary."

"You talk like a little pagan," said Mary. "I belie you are one at heart. But I'm not going to listen to yo heresies. The woes of the too-happy don't move me, son how."

Phoebe smiled a little absently, then she said, turni a wistful, anxious face to Mary as she walked at h side with both hands about her arm: "Tell me, de . . . do you think that Owen is happy, too? . . . *Rea* happy?"

Mary laughed, and, as often, that laugh hid things r so joyous.

"If symptoms can be relied on," she answered light "I should say he had a desperate attack of happiness."

"Only 'an attack'? . . . You think it will wear o like a fever?"

"Phoebe! . . . You really try one's patience. Do us enjoy this lovely day and stop croaking like a lit 'corbie.'"

"Sometimes," said Phoebe persistently, "I *feel* thin coming, Cousin Mary."

"That's against all sound philosophy."

"I'm not a bit of a philosopher, Cousin Mary."

"Well, just tell over your blessings and be thankful li the old woman in 'All on the Irish Shore,' who had on two teeth in her head, but thanked God that *they* met."

Phoebe giggled, and said she "wouldn't be mopey a more," and they walked on, talking lightly enough no up the road called "Turkey-Sag," between dense thick

of hazel and sassafras, and old stone and snake-fences, now red with Virginia-creeper.

Mary gathered a great nosegay of Michaelmas daisies and golden-rod and the pretty bee-orchid as they went along, and to this Phoebe added twigs of scarlet ash-berries and the vivid blue of wild lobelia. When they reached Logan's Peak they sat down to wait for Owen on the low stone wall that ran along the bare, wind-swept field that formed the "bald spot" on Logan's shaggy poll. The valley spread below them with its red and yellow chessboard of fertile fields dimmed by the blue gauze of autumn.

"Cousin Mary," began Phoebe after a long silence, her chin in her hand, her eyes on the pale wood smoke rising straight and calm from the chimneys of World's-End in its bower of trees. "I would like to ask you something. . . ."

"Now, Phoebe . . ." began Mary warningly.

"No—no, I'm not going to 'croak' any more," said the girl earnestly. "I told you I wouldn't. It's only something I want to ask you, because I know you'll tell me the truth . . . and, . . . well, because there's nobody else that I'd care to ask. But I'm a little afraid to ask it, too. May I?"

"Of course you may, darling."

Phoebe did not speak at once; then she said in a little rush, colouring as she did so:

"It's this. . . . Do you think I've improved at all in the last eighteen months? . . . I mean, do you think I'm a little . . . wiser . . . (that seems a big word to use, but *you* know what I mean). A little . . . a little worthier to be his wife?"

Those hungry, wistful eyes went straight to Mary's heart. She slipped along the wall, and put her arm about Phoebe's shoulders.

"I do, I do!" she said heartily. "You've grown and improved in every way. I notice it all the time. I spoke to Owen of it only yesterday, and to Sally. . . ."

She broke off. Phoebe's face fell.

"Please, please . . ." she said in a low voice. "Don't talk to Cousin Sally about me . . . please don't."

"Why, dear?"

"She . . . she doesn't like me."

"Now, Phoebe . . . you mustn't mind Sally's crusty

ways. There's ever, ever so much that's good in poor Sally."

Phoebe's face had a sort of strained eagerness. "I know there is, Cousin Mary. She can't help not liking me. I'm not blaming her for it. It's only that I'd rather, . . . if you don't mind, . . . that you didn't talk to her about me."

"She said nothing unkind, I assure you," said Mary, but, as she cast about in her mind for something positively kind that Sally had said, she could not find it. "And what Owen said," she continued, "would have made up to you for what a hundred Sallies, all hating you, might have said."

Phoebe's face was transfigured.

"Now she is perfectly beautiful," thought Mary, with a pang that shamed her, but that she could not help. "A moment ago she merely looked fresh and vivid. What a passion her love must be to change her like that all in a breath."

Phoebe was fairly stammering in her shy eagerness. "Could you . . . w-would you tell me something that he said, Cousin Mary?"

She was too wrapt in her own emotion to notice that Mary changed also, that she grew pale, and the little dimple at her mouth's corner flickered nervously. "Of course I'll tell you, goosie," she answered in her soft, tranquil voice. "He said . . ."

"Yes . . . yes . . ." cried Phoebe, and caught Mary's hand in both her own, holding it to her breast.

"He said that the more he knew you, the more he loved you. . . ."

"Oh, *Mary!*"

"He said that he was like the man in the legend who plucked a lovely flower, and then found that its roots were covered with jewels."

"Oh!" Phoebe hid her face in her hands.

"He said that you had grown so close to him that he couldn't tell 'where he ended and you began!' . . . I'm quoting his own words. . . . And that when he left you, even for twenty-four hours, he felt as though he were maimed. Why, you silly child! What is the matter?"

For tears were dripping through Phoebe's fingers. Her whole body was quivering.

Mary put her arms close about her and was silent. "*Ce*

n'est pas la sagesse, mais c'est magnifique," she paraphrased to herself.

Phoebe divined her thought with that odd, sure telepathy which visits us all in certain moments of spiritual clairvoyance. She looked up, and in her tear-wet face her great, glowing eyes had a certain Sybilline dignity.

"I know well what you must feel when you look at him and me together, Cousin Mary. No one could feel more than I do how little and unworthy I am beside him. But . . ." she drew in a deep breath, looking out to the far horizon, "but a woman who worships a man and who . . . who belongs to him utterly . . . knows something that all the books and all the wise men of the ages couldn't tell her."

"I know, darling," said Mary softly, all forgetful now of self, "you have borne his child."

And she did not wonder that Phoebe hid her face again before the wonder and mystery and awful joy of this thought.

They sat without speaking until Owen's voice hailed them from the wood below. He came up brandishing a letter, the dogs about him, Wizzy and Bran snuffling among the dead leaves, and Rab proudly bearing the old ash stick which had belonged to Owen's father and which he always used both in town and country.

"I thought it was too good to last!" he called. "I was saying 'Unberufen' and knocking on wood all this morning."

"What is it?" asked Phoebe, growing pale.

"Nothing to be frightened about," he reassured her. "But a sad bore when people are as selfishly contented as we World's-Enders. It's just a letter from Mrs. Beresford to Sally. I've spoken to you often about Sylvia Beresford, Phoebe. She's a perfect dear . . . but just at this moment we *could* manage without her."

"Is she coming here?"

"Wait. I'll read you both her letter."

And, seating himself on the broom-sedge at their feet, he read aloud Sylvia Beresford's letter to Sally. It seemed that Lord Bemyss had come over to shoot bear in the Rocky Mountains, bringing Lady Francie with him, who in her turn had persuaded Dempsy Torrance to come, too. Sylvia was to take them to the Virginia Hot Springs next week, and she said that, as Sally and Owen

had told her so often to ask herself to World's-End whenever she liked, . . . she wondered now if it would be perfectly convenient to have her, and, if they didn't mind, Dempsy Torrance also, who was quite wild to see Phoebe again. As for her (Sylvia), they knew how anxious she was to know Phoebe, of whom everyone said such lovely things. Francie, who had developed rheumatism on the voyage over, was going straight through to the Hot Springs, but, if Owen and "Mrs. Owen" and Sally would have them, she and Dempsy would stop off at Crewe.

"So, you see," said Owen, putting the letter back soberly into the envelope, "Armida's garden is going to be invaded."

Phoebe turned a downcast face to Mary.

"I told you that I felt something coming," she said.

Both Owen and Mary laughed at her.

"If your presentiments aren't ever more darkly filled than on this occasion you'll be a lucky girl," jeered Mary affectionately.

But Phoebe couldn't be smiled out of her "down" mood. "Of course I want to know Owen's friend, and to see dear Dempsy again," she said, "but somehow it seems the *end* of something. I don't know why—but that's the way I feel. I just simply can't help it."

He remembered this feeling of hers and Mary's account of her persistent apprehensiveness when, about a week later on the morning of the day that Sylvia and Dempsy were to arrive, Sally handed him the following telegram:

"So very, very disappointed. Poor Frances acute attack on train. Will stop Washington with her till better. Met Richard at hotel here. Told him he simply must take Dempsy on to Crewe. They arrive train agreed on.

SYLVIA."

XXXVIII

AS carefully as Owen had schooled himself against this moment, which, sooner or later, had inevitably to come, the shock of it was as violent as though he had never considered its possibility, and instantly there rose in him the thought of Phoebe and all the dread and horror this meeting with Richard would mean to her.

Sally, having no key to the set expression of his face, as he stood silent, reading over this message for the second time, thought bitterly:

"He never loved my boy. If he knew, he would turn him adrift without a penny." Then came another thought in a flash. "If he knew—*he might kill him.*"

She sat down quickly on the sofa near which they were standing, and put up her handkerchief as if to shield her face from the fire. For a second or two she thought that she was going to faint. But the mist cleared, and, though her heart pounded dreadfully, she kept her senses. It was strange that she had never thought of this awful possibility before, . . . she, who knew better than anyone else the fearful savagery of the Randolph temper when roused to its utmost. That Owen never gave way to anger as a rule was all the more ominous, and she thought with a sick shudder, as she had thought once before, of that scriptural saying: "Beware the wrath of the patient man."

As she glanced sideways at the tall figure standing so quietly with that yellow paper in its hands, . . . the immense physical strength of which she had been so proud in him now seemed to her brutal and unnecessary in a civilised being. And she began to grow uneasy over Owen's continued silence. What was he thinking? What would he say when he did speak? Perhaps he had some other grudge against Richard? . . . Perhaps there was some secret reason that would make him say he didn't care to have him at World's-End. . . . And, much as such a decision would have saved her and Richard himself, yet the jealous, unreasoning passion of maternity in her heart made her feel hot with anticipatory anger at the mere thought of such a slight to her son.

There! He was going to speak! . . . Well? . . .

"This will be an unexpected pleasure for you, Sally. Richard seems to have stopped a shorter time in North Carolina than he meant to," was what he said. "I must go and tell Phoebe to have fires lighted in his rooms."

And he went out.

Sally sat looking after him. She thought:

"Something has occurred between them that Richard hasn't told me of. I believe he detests my boy."

Her hands clenched, and the dark hue settled on her cheek-bones. She had little love for Owen in her heart at that moment.

But Owen did not go to Phoebe. He went into his study instead, and stood for a long time gazing at the fire. Then he turned and began to walk measuredly up and down the room. Since the day of little Diana's birth he had not suffered as he was suffering now, and it was chiefly the thought of the ordeal that lay before Phoebe that wrung his heart and nerves. And he was powerless now to help her as he had been then. But in this instance a new dread unmanned him, the dread as to how she would be able to sustain the terrible test that lay directly before her. At any time its severity would have been fearful, but now, at such short notice, with so little preparation, . . . and then, too, having to play the part of hostess under such circumstances, . . . to have to sit at the head of that table where Richard's mother had always sat during his former visits, . . . to be obliged to address him casually in her rôle of hostess. Yet there was no escape, and, even while he hesitated to deal her this cruel blow, the minutes were slipping,—those few precious minutes which were left her for preparation.

He started to the door, but stopped and thought again, standing in the middle of the floor, his nether lip between his teeth, as always in moments of intense emotion. Would it not be better for Mary to tell her this? Mary had spoken to him of Phoebe's dislike for Richard as something that she was glad of. If the poor child showed something of her inner feeling at the news of his coming, Mary would attribute it to her dislike of him and her disappointment at having the sweet quiet of their life broken into by one distasteful to her.

Yes. He would manage so that Mary should be the one to tell her. And walking rapidly, his lip still between his teeth, he went in search of Mary.

He found her in the dining-room arranging a great *épergne* of golden-rod and Michaelmas daisies. The autumn wild flowers were always used on the table at World's-End until their brilliant reign was over.

"Solomon would have found this royal enough, wouldn't he?" she asked, looking with a smile at her white fingers all powdered with pollen. "They're like solid gold plumes from a king's canopy, and they cover one with gold dust."

"Mary," said Owen abruptly, "Richard will be here this evening."

"Oh, *Owen!*" she said, and dropped down on the edge

of the black mahogany table that reflected her white frock and the yellow flowers as in a dark tarn.

"Yes. I'm sorry, too. We were such a happy little company. But it can't be helped. And I'm so rushed" (he looked at his watch) "that I can't stop and break it to Phoebe myself. Downer's waiting for me now. It will be a trial to her . . . disliking him as she does. Would you mind, like the dear you always are, . . . just looking Phoebe up and telling her to have fires lighted in his old rooms? . . ."

"Oh, *dear!*" said Mary, and she sighed heavily, picking up the scraps of leaf and bloom from the table. "How did it happen, Owen? How is it he's coming so suddenly like this? . . ."

Owen told her of the telegram.

"Well, of course it can't be helped," she said. "But it *is* provoking. Richard's atmosphere is just like coal-dust, to me at least. It smirches everything. Poor Phoebe! How she will hate it. She can't ever bear to hear him talked of. Yes, I'll go at once."

And, gathering up her gardening gloves and shears, she went off in her turn to look for Phoebe.

She found her in her bedroom drying her hair, which America had just washed, before the fire. Kneeling on the white fur hearth-rug, she let the heavy lengths droop over her face like a splendid flag of golden tissue, carding it with her fingers and shaking it lightly in the warm glow.

America had left the room.

"Phoebe," said Mary. "You'll be a dreadful little trial with your presentiments after this, but I've something more disagreeable to tell you."

Phoebe knelt quite motionless. She felt afraid. "What is it, Cousin Mary."

"My poor dear, Lady Bemyss is very ill in Washington, and Sylvia Beresford is stopping on with her. And so Richard is bringing Miss Torrance on for her. He comes with her this evening."

Phoebe knelt on, perfectly motionless, under the veil of her thick hair. She looked like some image of a girl turned by a wicked witch into a fountain of gold.

"Well," said Mary, "has my bad news stricken you with dumbness?"

Phoebe's inner world was breaking up about her with

the crash and impact of the spring ice on some far northern river. She did not hear Mary's words. She could not hear anything but that roar of disastrous wreckage in the invisible world where she knelt in darkness.

"This evening?" she said finally in a low voice.

"Yes. On that six o'clock train that comes from Washington, you know. I'm *so* sorry for you, Phoebe. I know how you dislike him, and I do, too, I'm afraid."

"Does Owen know?"

"Yes. He sent me to tell you."

"And . . . and Cousin Sally?"

"Yes. The telegram was to her, you know. My dear child, do let me help you dry that mane. You'll suffocate with it over your face like that." She would have parted it and gathered it aside from Phoebe's face, but the girl stopped her.

"No . . . please, Cousin Mary. I can't dry it any way but this. It's so thick."

She leaned forward and began carding it and shaking it again in the firelight.

"Don't take it so to heart, Puss," said Mary kindly. "After all, he can't really harm you, you know. It isn't as if you were in his power in any way. Mercy me! I should hate to be in Master Richard's power, I confess."

"Where is Owen, Cousin Mary?"

"He went off in a great hurry to speak with Downer."

"Do you know when he'll be back?"

"No, dear. He didn't say. Before long I should think. Why? . . . Do you want to see him?"

"No. I only wanted to know where he was."

Under her smothering hair, in that dark chaos of broken thoughts, Phoebe whispered "God . . . God . . . God . . . " three times, as poor Falstaff did when he was dying. Then again she whispered: "God . . . let her go . . . let me be alone."

As if in answer to this wild, plain prayer, Sally called to Mary from the hall below.

"There! I must go, dear. Sally needs me. Shall I send America?"

"No, . . . thank you. I'm going to take a nap when my hair's dry."

Mary ran out, calling: "Coming! Coming!"

Swaying, stumbling over the hem of her dressing gown in her breathless haste, Phoebe ran on little, shoeless feet,

and locked the door softly, . . . leaning against it and still holding both hands about the key after it was turned home in the lock.

"God . . . God . . . God . . ." she kept saying, clinging there to the big key, with her hair streaming damply about her. The word was like a sort of hard, fierce sobbing the way it broke from her, "God . . . God . . . God . . ."

XXXIX

IT seemed to Richard that no magpie, tipsy on wine stolen from the autumn presses, ever chattered as that English girl chattered on the drive from Crewe station to World's-End. Of everything and everyone, of things possible and impossible she piped and twittered, . . asking questions which she answered herself in the same breath . . . making statements and counter statements in one endless arabesque of crisp, staccato verbiage.

What a sweetly pretty landscape! . . . wasn't it like Devonshire? No, it wasn't really like Devonshire, but the earth was red, as in some parts of Devonshire. . . . Oh! the quaint, droll niggers! . . . No, the big niggers were not really quaint, but the little niggers were too utterly 'deevy.' . . . What blue hills! . . . As blue as her own eyes! Or . . . were they? . . . (Richard, rather rudely taciturn, refused the obvious reply to this, and with perfect serenity she answered herself.) No . . . her eyes were a horrid porcelain-y blue, and these were mysterious and opal-y; more, much more like dear Hoppo's eyes. Did he know Hoppo? . . . The Duchess of Wrexborough?

She had the most beautiful blue eyes in the world, except, of course, Phoebe Randolph . . . people at home had gone quite mad over Phoebe Randolph's eyes . . . didn't he think she had the most wonderful eyes he had ever seen? . . . But of course he did. . . . How in the world had he managed not to fall in love with her? Did he know Vic Hadringham? Well, . . . he knew who he was at any rate. Poor Vic had never got over it. . . . There was Miss Rothenheim . . . ten million pounds in her own right, they said, and ripping to look at, . . . but Vic simply fled from her ever since he'd fallen so madly in love

"PHOEBE'S INNER WORLD WAS BREAKING UP ABOUT HER"
—*Page 302*

with Phoebe. . . . And what a sweet she was! . . . And she was simply wild to see the baby. . . . Hoppo and Francie Bemyss both said it was a duck of a baby with eyes like Phoebe's. . . . Wasn't he curious to see it? But, then, men never cared for babies . . . and so forth, and so forth, with scarcely a pause for breath.

Dempsy told Phoebe afterward that she had been compelled to "rattle" to prevent herself from feeling as though she were driving to a funeral with one of the mutes.

"Oh, my dear soul!" cried she. "Sylvia Beresford told me that he was a genius, and a wit and a wonder . . . but all that I can say is that I should think Poe's raven would be a jolly companion compared with him."

Tea was waiting for them in the rose-room when they arrived. Sally, Mary, Phoebe, Owen, Mr. Nelson, Miss Talliaferro were all assembled there. From a long distance, as down a narrow funnel of piercing light, Richard saw a tall, slight form in white coming towards him . . . a little hand of ice was put in his. . . . Yes . . . that was Phoebe Nelson's voice, saying:

"How do you do?"

He heard himself say:

"Thanks. How do you do?"

His mother came up to ask if he would have a cup of tea. He went off with her to get it. Yes. It had happened. They had met again and spoken. Now they were sitting quietly in the same room, and no one seemed to have noticed anything unusual. He caught low tones of the warm, full voice that suddenly made him feel as though eighteen months had shrivelled into yesterday. And he kept glancing covertly towards her until he heard his mother's whisper at his ear:

"Don't look at her so often . . . get hold of yourself."

With a qualm of fear he turned and began talking rapidly to Sally of the journey, and Sylvia Beresford, and the shooting in North Carolina.

And Phoebe, smiling and speaking very fast and low to Dempsy Torrance, was saying in her heart:

"It's over. . . . I've touched his hand, and I'm not dead of shame and horror. Yes, . . . it's over . . . but it has just begun, too. Can I keep this up? My voice sounds natural. I'm not trembling. How can I be like this? It's because I'm desperate. Yes . . . it's despera-

tion that makes me able to be like this. . . . I'm fighting for more than life. . . . But can I keep it up? Can I? . . . Can I?''

All the time that she was talking with Dempsy, speaking so quick and low, in her heart she was saying this, over and over, over and over.

And she looked well, though a little over-excited. Her eyes, lit by that inner fire of desperation, blazed almost as black as Sally's in her small face. As on that dreadful day when she had received Richard's first long letter, . . . she had gone for help to her little box of nail-rouge, and the touch of false carmine on her smooth young skin looked only like the natural flush of autumn in the candle and firelight.

As for Owen, the sight of that fine, lonely courage went to the quick. It seemed to him the most moving, stirring thing that he had ever witnessed. Tears scorched his eyes, dried quickly by the smouldering anger in his breast. And this anger burnt all the more fiercely under its crust of self-control, because of his helplessness to help her. ''Yes, life treats us like toys,'' he thought. ''Softly, calmly it takes us, crushes us, . . . sets us here and there like manikins. The three of us in this room together . . . what an outrage of all decency, . . . of all humanity! Yet we are without resource, . . . quite powerless to help ourselves or one another. A cur snapped at a star, and it fell and he slavered it in his jaws. And no stick broke the cur's back —no god set the star again in its place. My star . . . shining out of the dust . . . brave . . . brave . . . braver than battalions of picked men. . . . What men could act as she is acting now? Not one! . . . He! . . . white . . . scared . . . babbling like a sick fool in a fever. . . . And Sally . . . scared too . . . scared to death . . . poor wretch! . . . But my little love . . . my little warrior . . . bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. . . .''

''Good Lud, Mr. Randolph!'' exclaimed Aunt Charlotte, by whom he was seated. ''What a fierce face you've put on, to be sure! . . . I vow you alarm me! 'Tis nothing less than a revolution you're pondering, I'll lay me last farthing.''

This voice from the thirties brought him back with a jerk.

''Dear lady, I was thinking of nothing more sinister than whether Jonathan had put the claret too near the

fire," he assured her. He knew her old-fashioned interest in fine wines and the care of them.

She responded at once.

"Ah, to hear a gentleman solicitous about a rare vintage takes me back . . . takes me back . . ." she said with real feeling. "I remember the days when a slave would be trounced for jolting a bottle of port. You're of the old school, I see, Mr. Randolph. My great-niece is very fortunate. My respected father used to say, 'A man who knows how to care for his wines will know how to care for his wife.' He was at vast pains to cultivate my taste in wines . . . at vast pains. To this day I prefer a rich bo-kay of claret to posies from a glass house. Mortimer Smith had a line in a poem he writ me, touching on my knowledge of wines. . . .

> "Falernian, Falernian,
> Great Horace sang, but was a man;
> Fair Charlotte, though a maiden chaste,
> Hath e'en as chasto (for wine) a taste."

Owen listened with apparent grave absorption, which Aunt Charlotte took for deferential interest and which delighted her.

And now the time had come when he must join his sister and her son or seem peculiar. He had had no word with Richard since his arrival, and he felt Sally's eyes on him from time to time. It was one of the things that had to be gone through with on this ironical evening. He excused himself to the old lady and went over to where Sally and Richard were seated a little apart near one of the windows. He noticed Sally straighten as she saw him coming, and Richard jerk his chin sideways with a nervous trick that he had inherited from his father.

"Quite a long time since I've seen you, Richard," he said, taking the chair next Sally. "The East didn't brown you much. Was it up to your expectations?"

Like poor Phoebe, he wondered at the naturalness of his own voice. Richard was not so successful. He stammered slightly, and changed colour. Then a sort of cold recklessness took hold of him, and he slid easily into his usual manner.

"The best of the East is in the dawn," he said. "I seemed to be progressing through a hall of post-cards. But China is less disappointing when one knows how to avoid

the obvious. In an inland temple I found the most astounding music."

"Yes. I've heard that their music is astounding," said Owen drily. "You really mean that it astounded you with its beauty?"

Sally was watching Richard avidly, much as a mother mongoose might watch its youngling's first encounter with a cobra. Richard rose fully to the occasion. His manner was perfectly assured now, and his voice civilly if aloofly respectful.

"I realise that it must sound forced to you, sir, when I confess that I did find it beautiful. There are certain delicate dissonances which appeal to me in every art, . . . and the music of China is as exquisitely inharmonious as a fuchsia. It combines red and violet tones in much the same manner. Of course it takes a special ear to relish it. My Chinese music teacher told me that I heard like an Oriental. It's odd, I admit."

"Perhaps we have a Chinaman in our ancestry somewhere," said Owen. "You might ferret him out, Sally."

He was thinking:

"Those lips kissed her. Those arms held her. . . ."

Suddenly rushed over him the memory of that poor young girl of the nobility who, during the Reign of Terror, was forced to drink a goblet of human blood from the gutter in order to save her father's life. This was to Owen like swallowing that unspeakable draught. Yet he heard his own voice continuing calmly, naturally:

"Shall you stop long with us this time? The Warwick hounds are running well, I hear. The meets have begun earlier this season. You might put in some good days."

"Thanks. It's very kind of you, Uncle Owen," said Richard. "But I shall have to go on day after tomorrow. I was on my way to some friends near Baltimore when I met Mrs. Beresford. They're expecting me, you see. I was meaning to run down for a week or two in November if you could put me up then."

"Of course. What time in November?"

"Somewhere about the end, I think."

As if in spite of himself, quite automatically, Richard had invented this lie on the spur of the moment. Perhaps his subconscious monitor had told him that already it looked strange that he had fixed no time for visiting his

uncle after so long a separation, especially since Owen had been married during the interval.

With ready wit Sally abetted him.

"Yes, it was the end of November that you mentioned in your last letter. It came yesterday. I forgot to tell you, Owen."

"Well, we shall expect you in November, then. You'll be able to get some good shooting. The quail are thick at World's-End this year."

Phoebe, listening to Dempsy's headless and tailless chatter, was aware of those two speaking together in the finest nerves of her being. The lightness of Phoebe's brighter hours was always offset by other hours heavy with bitterness,—but never since her marriage had the horror of what she had suffered and what she had done suffocated her as now. So dreadful was the confusion of all her ideas that she felt like starting up from her place and hurrying breathlessly after death, like a starving beggar after one who carries loaves. To die . . . to die quickly, that was the only thing that could cleanse her of this shame. Then the next instant came one of those sharp recoils with which her vivid, vibrant nature was set as with violent springs. "No . . ." she thought, "no . . . I will get above it. I will grind it under my feet. I am worth while in spite of him. My love has washed me clean. I am not that girl. I am made new by my love and Owen's love. And I am going to tell Owen. . . . I am going to tell him. . . . I will be strong. I will be brave. Even if it is the end of my happiness—of everything. I will take my life and put it high . . . high . . . out of their reach."

But then she thought of the child upstairs in its crib, and she put up her hand over her eyes an instant. A wild thought came to her that the scream, stifled on her lips, must rise changed into a terrible look from her eyes.

Dempsy's voice came clear and carrying:

"Oh, I *say*, Phoebe! I'd forgot! The baby! . . . I must see that baby before I dress for dinner! Can't I see her now?"

"Yes. Come," said Phoebe, rising. "She'll be asleep, but we can peep at her."

The two young women went out together.

"It's about time that we changed, too," said Owen, glancing at the clock. "Patton and Mr. Nelson, the clergy-

man who married us, are coming to dinner. You have your old rooms, Richard."

"Thanks, Uncle Owen. Mother told me."

"Then I leave him to you, Sally."

He also went out.

"Mother," said Richard in a low voice of intense bitterness, as Owen closed the door, "did I look the knave I felt, or did I play the hypocrite tolerably?"

Sally caught at his long, nervously twitching hand as it rested on the chair between them.

"No, no, my boy. You behaved wonderfully . . . really wonderfully, Richard. I was cold with fear at first—but you acted exactly as you should have done."

"And I was cold with disgust," said he sombrely. "Dante never invented a worse situation for his 'Inferno.'" His voice took a fierce, whispering note. "It's hellish, mother."

Sally rose.

"When you're dressed," she said, "come to my room. We can't talk here. Mary is looking at us now."

When Richard knocked at her bedroom door Sally was seated in an arm-chair by the fire, fully dressed, having dismissed Mirabel. Another chair was drawn up, ready for Richard. He sank into it moodily, crossing his legs and moving his foot up and down in its narrow pump as a nervous woman does. He was extremely pale, and his nostrils looked pinched.

"My poor, poor boy," said his mother, leaning towards him and putting her hand over his as she had done in the drawing-room. "Tell me how this dreadful thing happened. Was there *no* escape?"

Richard's fingers jerked under hers. He did not look at her, but continued gazing sombrely into the fire.

"You know Mrs. Beresford, mother. Besides, illness always gives rise to a low tyranny. What could I say? I was like a rat with a clever terrier. She had me by the nape."

"Couldn't you have invented something . . . something vital?"

He made a movement of impatience, and drew away his hand, pretending to look for his cigarette case.

". . . I must have left it in my other coat. . . . What could I have invented, my dear mother? Business? . . .

She knows I have no business. My art? Art isn't supposed to have claims over sickness. I couldn't very well pretend a sudden illness for myself."

"And it was as serious as that? Is Lady Bemyss in danger? It seem to me very odd indeed that this English girl didn't stay with Sylvia if it's as bad as that. The English are certainly very queer."

"Oh, the girl's a shallow little jade. She hasn't an ounce of real feeling in her whole composition. But the other isn't in any immediate danger, only in great pain. There were trained nurses of course. Mrs. Beresford's chief anxiety seemed to be that this rattle-pate girl shouldn't have her American visit spoiled."

Sally frowned.

"Sylvia can never see an inch beyond what obsesses her at the moment. She has the highest hand about carrying out her own wishes. But, after all. . . ."

She looked yearningly at his set profile so determinedly turned to her.

"After all, Richard, . . . though the suddenness of it was a dreadful shock . . . it had to come . . . some time."

A short sound escaped him, like the beginning of a laugh.

"What puppets we all are!" he said.

"Yes, . . . it had to come," Sally repeated firmly. "We've gone over that often enough, God knows."

Richard turned and looked at her for the first time. "Do you know," he said slowly, "I've sometimes thought the game isn't worth the candle, mother."

"What do you mean?" she asked, much startled.

"Just this," he said shortly. "There are quite frequent moments when I think that I'd prefer to cut the whole thing and be a pauper with a free mind. There's something villainously low in cringing this way for . . . for . . ." he gulped, "for money," he ended harshly.

His mother gripped his arm in her thin fingers. "Don't talk like a madman, Richard. Prudence is not low. . . ."

"In this case it is," he said sullenly.

"No, Richard. I deny that. . . . I deny it absolutely," she said, her face beginning to burn. "Besides, that isn't the only consideration. . . . Any marked change in your manner to Owen, . . . any sudden break with him would be bound to raise suspicion. Everyone would talk . . . everyone would question . . . Owen himself . . . Richard!

—If by your own imprudence . . . by some chance rising from it . . . if you should start his mind to working by some mad impulse of self-will . . . yes, of selfishness . . . (. . . it would be cruelly, cruelly selfish towards me!) . . . Yes . . . if you did that . . . dreadful things might happen, Richard, horrible, unspeakable things. . . . Only today I was thinking . . . yes . . . yes . . . I was thinking this morning . . . when I watched him reading that wire. . . . His face was so hard, so cruel. . . . He doesn't like you even now, Richard. He's never liked you. Then think . . . *think* what it would be if he ever . . . found out. Richard . . .'' She had his arm in both hands now. ''He might kill you . . . before he realised what he was doing, he might kill you. . . .''

Richard grew alarmed at the distorted expression on her face so darkly flushed. ''Dear mother . . . don't work yourself up,'' he said, taking one of her hands from his arm and kissing it. ''Men don't kill one another nowadays . . . at least not men like my uncle . . .''

''You don't know the Randolph temper as I do. . . . It runs underground for years, then breaks out suddenly—wrecks everything. Why, here, in this very house—your great-grandfather killed a man with his bare hands. It was hushed up . . . but everyone knew . . . it's local history . . . Richard . . . promise me . . . promise me on your honour that you won't do any rash, mad thing!''

Her face was working so painfully, her eyes so burning, that he felt more and more alarmed. ''Yes . . . yes . . . I promise,'' he said, putting his arm about her shoulders. ''Please quiet yourself, mother. I will do just as you like.''

Sally put her scorching cheek to his and held him a moment in silence. Then she said:

''I know how bitterly hard it all is . . . but it's better to get the first shock over. It will never be as hard as this again.''

''Again!'' he echoed her morosely, swinging back in spite of his anxiety on her account to his former mood. ''I was thinking just now that I'd rather be naturalised in some far country than have to go through this a second time. But women haven't the same feelings as men about such things. Their nerves aren't like ours. Look at you, mother, . . . ill as you are, when it comes to facing this

damnable situation, . . . perfectly calm, perfectly collected. . . . Look at *her*. . . ."

Sally gave him a quick, sidelong glance.

"Do you find her changed, Richard?"

"I find her devilishly self-possessed—quite the queen. She touched my hand as if it had been a toad, and looked between my eyebrows."

Sally's lips curled with a cruel sneer.

"You could scarcely expect her to look you in the eyes."

He went on, not heeding her, his look fixed on his nervously jerking foot.

"Why, she wasn't even pale. She had such a colour that she looked painted."

Sally's lips curled again.

"I dare say she was."

"Nonsense! She's too simple."

It was her turn to echo him.

" 'Simple!' You don't know her. 'Simple!' Why, she's as cunning as a monkey. She twists them all around her little finger, Owen, Mary, her father, the servants. . . . I am the only rebel in her little kingdom. And even I don't dare rebel openly." Her face had the expression of a snarl in the changeful firelight.

"Isn't she nice to you, mother?"

"As nice as I'll allow her to be."

"But wouldn't it be wise . . . ?"

"I'm as sick of wisdom as you are sometimes!" she exclaimed in a choked voice.

They sat for some minutes without speaking.

Presently Sally said in an entirely different voice,—a voice so changed that he looked up, startled:

"Richard. . . ."

"Yes, mother?"

"I asked you to come to my room for a special reason. I wanted to talk to you about—the child."

That dark flush, so like the flush that came to his mother's face in moments of sharp emotion, came now to his.

"Well . . ." he said very low.

"The child is . . . is lovely, Richard."

"Is it like her . . . ?"

"It's like her, most people think,—but there's something. . . . At times it is so like you when you were a baby, Richard, that it makes my heart stand still."

"You . . . you are . . . fond of it?"

"I'm human," said his mother in a hard voice; "after all, it's my grandchild."

"For God's sake, mother!" cried Richard, and got to his feet. His hands opened and shut nervously . . . the palms were wet.

"Sit down," said Sally quietly; "this at least is something that has to be discussed."

He sat down moodily, with the conventional obedience which he always gave her, and which he very rightly considered a part of perfect manners.

"I must say I can't see why we should discuss it," he said thickly.

Sally watched him from narrowed eyes.

"Perhaps," she said at last, "perhaps you, too, may find that you are human."

"What can you mean, mother?"

"Only that you must be doubly on your guard about this child. Oh, I know! You men have very lofty notions about the insignificance and absurdity of babies." She put her hot, dry hand again upon his knee. "Wait, . . . wait until some chance lets you feel the touch *of your own child* . . . the little clinging hands . . . the little lips. . . . Wait till the flesh of your own child touches you, Richard! . . . Then you'll thank me for having warned you."

This time he sprang up and began paeing the warm room with its sweetly acrid odour from the vervaine that Sally always used in her bath.

"I can't conceive of such a thing . . ." he muttered.

She had the wise-woman's just-sketched smile at her mouth's corner.

"Only be on your guard,—that is all I ask," she said.

Richard went to one of the windows, and stood looking out into the night. The shutters had not yet been closed, and the reflection of the wood fire in the panes of glass seemed burning among the branches of the tulip tree outside. He stared at it, knitting his straight black brows, so like his mother's, and thrusting out his lower lip. Then he said, without turning:

"Do you think they're happy, mother?"

"I think Owen is . . . for the present. He lives in a fool's paradise. He is besotted about her!"

"And . . . she . . . ? Do you think she's happy?"

"How could she be? . . . With me here . . . knowing.

With you . . . knowing. She's a clever little actress. But a woman,—even a light woman.—doesn't forget her first love—her child's father . . . in the twinkling of an eye."

Richard gave an exclamation that was like a groan.

"Don't, mother. Don't . . . *don't* . . ." he said.

"Very well. . . . But be on your guard. . . . Be on your guard every second, Richard."

Owen tapped at Phoebe's door. There was an instant's pause; then her voice, very low, said close to the crack:

"I can't let you in now, dear. But I'm almost dressed. I'll be ready before the others."

"Poor child!" he thought. "Poor little, courageous child. She can't even spare a moment from her desperate search for more courage." Aloud he said: "Never mind, sweetheart. I only wanted to know what you are going to wear."

"It's a new gown." A faint little laugh came through the crack of the door. "You've never seen it. Black and silver. I want to look very dignified and 'matronly.'"

He laughed, too, just to encourage her in her brave play-acting, and called back:

"May it add ten summers to your ripe age! . . . I'll go down and wait for you. Patton and the rector have come."

"Yes, please, dear," came the low voice. "I'll follow you in just a minute."

She heard his steps crossing the room, and then the sound of a closing door. She slipped down on her knees where she had been standing, and lifted her locked hands high towards the white ceiling.

"O God. . . . Someone . . . *someone* . . . help me . . . help me," she whispered, choking.

Then she got to her feet with a bound, her chin high.

"I'll help myself!" she said back of her little teeth. "I'll help myself . . . then God will *have* to help me."

She finished her hair, which she always did herself, then took up the little hand mirror, looking at her reflection carefully, full-face, three-quarters, profile. Yes . . . that would do. She picked up a bit of soft lint, and wiped some of the carmine from her cheeks. Excitement and pain had sent her own blood into them. Then she rang for America. The black gauze gown embroidered with silver was a little too elaborate perhaps for a small country

dinner, but it added the touch of stateliness that she desired, seeming to make her an inch or two taller.

America set the twist of black gauze upon her hair, with its knots of silver poppies just hiding the small ears,—and stepped back, elated.

"Dat's a sight prettier nor any crown in dee worl'!" she said. "I don't keer if 'twas dee Queen of England's an' had fifty p'ints to it! But law*sie!* Miss Phoebe, you does look sot an' settled in dat black dress. It sho' do make you look scornful."

"I want to look 'scornful,' Rikky," said her mistress with a faint little smile.

"Well, you looks it, all right," returned America. "'Tech-me-not an' you won't git stung' is *yo'* name to-night, Miss Phoebe. An' pret-*tee!* My Gawd! . . . You looks jes' like a wax doll in a show-case."

"Thank you, Rikky. You're a dear thing. I love you," said Phoebe. She took up her fan and handkerchief, and, bending forward, kissed the brown cheek before leaving the room.

XL

CHARLES PATTON was a rather remarkable man. At thirty he had held the professorship of anatomy in one of the first universities of America. At thirty-four he had been asked by the faculty to resign, owing to his habit of deep, steady drinking. At forty, from a wretched, shambling ghost of manhood, he had suddenly taken himself in hand, and grimly, as though harnessed with despair, had pulled the wreck of his life and his fortune from the mire. Now at fifty-three he was a man beloved and respected by the whole community where he lived and practised. He had received sound offers of advancement, one even from the very university which he had left some seventeen years ago in disgrace, but he refused them all. Owen, who knew him more intimately than any other man, was aware of his reason for conduct that puzzled most people and even angered them. They considered it a reckless indulgence in false pride that caused a man of such ability and brilliant parts as Charles Patton to remain "rotting away," as they expressed it, in a country neighbourhood when he might have been winning fame and fortune in one of the big centres of civilisation.

Owen honoured and loved him more for these reasons, which it seemed to him could have been divined by others with the exertion of only a slight amount of imagination. But "imagination," even in slight amounts, is a rarer quality than the uncommon "common" sense, which everyone is supposed to be endowed with in a greater or lesser degree.

Patton's explanation of his conduct was simple in the extreme. He was in all things rather a simple man, built on broad, noble lines. The architecture of his spirit was rather that of the temple of Phæstum than the more complex and ornate Gothic. As Marc Antony described himself, he was "a plain, blunt man—he only spoke right on" and acted as he spoke. . . .

"You see," he had said to Owen, " 'know thyself' was supposed to be the wisest advice the ancients had to give—and for me it holds good in these days . . . if I don't 'know myself' *in toto*, at least I know my chief weakness, and, as the chap said, 'my weakness is mighty strong.' I haven't climbed out of hell on my hands and knees, so to speak, to risk dropping back there by some silly chance. If I lived at a university or in a big town there would be convivial souls who would be saying constantly: 'Have a drink, Patton.' And, knowing Charles Patton as I do, I know very well, also, that sooner or later—when the devil was by, or his good angel napping, 'a drink' he would have. And that one 'drink' would beget forty . . . and there would I be 'with all hell at my hurdies,' as an old Scotsman I know puts it. So that is why, dear old man, I prefer to rot away in the country soberly, discreetly, reverently and in the 'fear of God.' The 'fear of God' let me tell you, by the way," he wound up, with the rare smile that lit his saturnine face to astonishing sweetness; " 'the fear of God' is small potatoes to 'the fear of whiskey' in those that have once felt it."

And so it made Owen very impatient and irritated when people sometimes commented to him on the vain obstinacy of Charles Patton's course in life, and implored him to "use his influence with him" and induce him to go forth into the world and gather up some of the ducats and laurels that were supposed to be awaiting him there in heaps.

In appearance he was striking, tall and gaunt, with immense bones that made his strong, flat wrists resemble the

lower joint of a thoroughbred's fore-leg. His face, sickly and weather-beaten in hue, was of a square darkness, and the great, dark, lugubrious eyes under the fine, bony forehead with its hollow temples recalled the later portraits of Edgar Allan Poe. In fact, his whole countenance was singularly like that of the poet, only formed on a larger scale and modelled more ruggedly. His smile, already mentioned, disclosing the adamantine teeth which ill health and dissipation had not been able to impair, was singularly charming and unexpected, gleaming in that swarthy, dour countenance like a snow-wreath in a cave. . . . His voice, broadly Virginian, despite his education in Germany, was slow, deep and quietly melancholy. Looking at him for the first time, even the most cynical felt, "Here is a man that I can trust to the bitter end."

Children and dogs and darkies adored him. Women found him strangely attractive. He had never married. And, as though fate had determined to arrange the drama of his life to fit the look of tragedy which had characterised his face from boyhood, his celibacy was universally thought to be the result of a dreadful event which had happened when he was only thirty-three. This was the death in the hunting field of the woman he loved. Before his eyes she had been thrown and dragged by her horse until . . . but such things are better left undescribed. Sufficient to say that for months afterwards poor Patton was like a maniac, had to be confined and cared for in a sanatorium, and there were many who believed that his downward course dated from that day, and was the direct result of it. In part they were right in this conclusion, but the root of the matter lay deeper in some mystery of the cellular brain tissues, or, as some would say, in the very atoms of his soul.

Patton had been off for a well-earned holiday in the far West when Owen and Phoebe returned from abroad, and this was to be his first meeting with them both since their marriage. He had been called away to a distant village at that time, and so had been unable to be present.

When Phoebe entered the rose-room she found her father and his cousin in deep converse on one of the sofas and Owen and Patton standing with parted coat-tails before the fire. Patton looked like a benign and mammoth crow in his evening clothes, with his great head

bent a little forward listening to what Owen was saying.

As Phoebe entered he dropped his big coat-tails and came forward, his face lighted by his smile.

"Is this little Phoebe or some foreign princess?" he said, taking both her hands and holding them. "Bless the child! I do believe she's been growing since her marriage —two good inches taller as I'm a man of science. You pretty thing. . . . You pretty thing. . . ." He broke off, smiling again, and swinging her hands to and fro. "'Marriage sholy do become you,' as I heard an old darkey say the other day. Such dignity! . . . Such hoity-toityness! . . . Does your majesty think that your majesty could condescend to give me a kiss?"

"Dear Doctor Charlie!" cried Phoebe and hugged him. Such had been her name for him since her babyhood. Somehow she felt safer when those huge, bony arms went round her in response than she had done for many a day. With Owen she could not feel safe, because she herself was a menace to him. But here was someone who could protect even Owen from disaster—or so it seemed to her.

"It's the beatings that have improved her so, Charles," said Owen, standing by with his hands on his lean flanks in a way he had. "A woman, a dog and a walnut tree, you know; . . . I do it for her good."

"Yes . . . he beats me. He beats me dreadfully," said Phoebe, with a little laugh that caught in her throat.

"A regular Bill Sykes, eh? . . . A Benvenuto Cellini . . . and I suppose you adore him for it in classic female fashion?"

"Yes . . . I adore him. . . ." said Phoebe, with another of the little laughs that were like sobs.

Patton thought:

"Over-strung about something . . . or just a woman's high-pressure mood over nothing probably . . . pupils markedly dilated. Wonder if the little witch has been using bella donna? Must give her a scolding later if she has."

Aloud he said:

"I diagnose the case as typically a Desdemona-Othello instance of sporadic infection from the microbe, . . . '*Amor stupendus*,' which it is well known clogs the system with even greater rapidity than the deadly *trichina spiralis*. But the disease is only fatal when brought in con-

tact with the Iago bacillus. You must both gargle three times a day with antigeloso."

This nonsense brought a more natural laugh from Phoebe, and Henry Nelson came over to greet her.

"My last kiss was bestowed on a pale, little bride," he said, as he kissed her hot cheek. "Now, I salute a proudly glowing matron."

Owen laughed.

"There, Phoebe!" he said. "The black gown has done its work. You see, you strike Mr. Nelson as matronly."

"The puss has certainly grown very tall and dignified," replied the rector.

"And as I said," put in Charles Patton, "he thinks that she's grown."

"It's really the black frock, Doctor Charlie," said Phoebe, glancing down at herself.

"Well, you're a picture in it," retorted he, smiling. "You remind me of a fairy fallen in an ink-pot."

The others laughed at this poetic simile, and Mr. Nelson from his arm-chair said:

"I have never seen you attired in black before, my daughter. But it becomes you well. Black is always a dignified wear, though tending to an effect of gloom. I am glad that you lightened it with silver. Is it customary nowadays to conceal the ears so completely? I should think that it would make one hard of hearing."

"Don't disturb yourself, sir," said Patton. "Eve could hear through a head-dress of prickly-pear pads."

Here Dempsy and Mary entered together, and shortly came Aunt Charlotte in a grand toilette of robin-egg taffeta trimmed with blonde lace outlined with straw.

"Did you ever see such an old darling!" whispered Dempsy to Mary. "I'm sure the old Duchess of Kent—Queen Victoria's mother, you know—wore lace like that."

"It's probably a cherished heirloom and has a story," whispered back Mary. "Ask her about it later. She loves to have her finery commented on."

Dempsy took the first opportunity of doing so. When Aunt Charlotte was established on a sofa with her azure skirts spread amply about her, and her handkerchief (which she wore drooping from a ring and chain on her little finger) carefully adjusted, she ran over to her and drew up a little velvet-covered "cricket," seating herself

at the old lady's feet. She was more and more fascinated by this near view of Aunt Charlotte *en grande tenue.*

The point-lace handkerchief with its tiny heart of thread cambric—the smelling bottle of Persian glass in its little gold filigree holder—the chicken-skin fan with its painting of Venus drawn by doves and surrounded by a covey of Cupids—the hair-bracelet with its chased-gold clasp, and the long crystal-drop earrings that pulled the lobes of the old ears into the likeness of plump, pink oysters,—all these adornments seemed to her too wonderful for reality.

"Dear Miss Talliaferro," she said, "your gown is too perfectly lovely! . . . I was talking to your great-niece about this marvellous lace, and she said she thought it had a story and that I might ask you about it. Do you mind? I'm English, you know, and we have some enchanting old ladies in England, but not one that's a patch on you. . . . You're *too* darling and wonderful! . . . Do you mind?"

Aunt Charlotte, perfectly charmed, preened herself like a bird of paradise in the sunlight. "Mind, me dear?" said she. " 'Tis a joy to me old loyalist heart to find meself pleasing to a daughter of the mother country. Yes, me love . . . if all colonists had been as loyal to King Jarge IIId as me noble grandfather was, . . . 'tis a subject of King Jarge Vth would be talking to you this minute!"

Dempsy felt torrents of glee inundating her inner world. What a lark! . . . What a lovely story to take back to England. This old lady might have just stepped out of a play by Congreve with her "King Jarges" and "me loves."

"How sweetly original of you!" she cried. "And how plucky you are, dear Miss Talliaferro. If *I* were an American with your sentiments, I should be afraid that the other Americans would tar and feather me—isn't that what they do to people they don't approve of?"

Aunt Charlotte took a sniff at her smelling bottle and winked one spirited old eye over it at the delighted Dempsy.

"Me child," she said—"did anyone lay so much as a finger on Charlotte Talliaferro, all Virginia would rise to a man!—I'm a bit of history, me love, and America has not so much history that she can afford to destroy any

of it!" She joined her dry little chuckle to Dempsy's gurgle of laughter.

"And what about the Fourth of July, and the Declaration of Independence, and the 'Father of His Country,' and all that?" asked the subject of "Jarge Vth."

"The Fourth of July, me dear, is me 'black Monday'—and the Declaration of Independence is a vastly overrated document—not to call it more inelegantly a pretty pack o' lies. Why, take one of the first statements, child. Was ever such a monstrous fib as that?—'All men are born free and equal.'—A nigger born the equal of a Caucasian! A lame man born the equal of one with three legs! A blind man and a leper born free! Fiddle-de-dee! —Bombast and fustian!—As for Jarge Washington, me dear, a more overrated being never breathed!—A most middling person in all respects save luck. Look at the peanut nose of him and the prunes and prism-y mouth!—And hark ye, me love. None so chaste as the man history delights to honour!—Tut! Tut!—They'd have us think the great Jarge was of so ticklish a prudery that the sight of his own calf without a stocking would bring the blush of modesty to his cheek. Ne'er ye believe it, honey. A right naughty dog with the ladies was the sainted Jarge, unless me forbears lied worse than history, and was probably the father of far more than his country, me dear!—"

Dempsy could scarcely believe her ears. Here was an American story to take back, as fresh as Diana rising from a dew-pond. She sat absorbing Aunt Charlotte at every pore of her clever, imitative mind,—her accent, her mannerisms, her little air of having been the confidante of buried centuries. "Just fancy!" she breathed, to keep her going, "if you could have your way, the States would be part of England now!"

"That they would, me love. But Virginia is the state of states. Had she but been loyal, the rest would have followed as sheep-burrs move with a mule's tale. But, lud!—Hear me likening the glorious old Dominion to a mule's tale! Similes are slippery stepping stones to fact, as I was used to tell poor Mortimer Smith—a gifted man, me dear, who once writ a sonnet to me eyebrow,—or rather to me whole person. In those days me hair came to me ankles and was gold as a guinea. But as to Virginia, me child, did ye not know 'twas counted one of England's kingdoms in those days?—Fie! ye did not? Why, Charles

the Second was proclaimed King of England on the eighth of May, 1660, and on the twentieth of next September was proclaimed in Virginia, and the seal of Virginia bore the motto, '*En dat Virginia quintum,*' in which the noun, '*regnum,*' is understood. 'Behold, Virginia gives the fifth (kingdom)!' Yes, me love! Later, in 1702, they altered it to '*quintam,*' to agree with the unexpressed noun, '*coronam*'—'Behold, Virginia gives the fifth crown.' And ye really did not know that? Well, well. The Latin sticks in me poor brain like a cockle-burr, when 'tis but a sieve for the name of the last vulgarian that sits down so lumpishly in the presidential chair!"

Nothing could have exceeded the scorn with which Aunt Charlotte mentioned this article of state furniture.

Dempsy was enjoying herself so hugely that she sparkled like a brown diamond, and twisted a little curl of her hair round and round regardless of her *coiffure*—a trick dating back to lesson-conning in the schoolroom.

"And the lace, dear Miss Talliaferro—don't forget the story of your beautiful lace," she urged.

"Bless me stars! From lace to Jarge Washington is a far cry, me dear. Yes, it has its simple annals, me dear old lace. 'Twas sent to me mother at the time of the sainted Victoria's coronation." (Dempsy gave a little wriggle of joy at her own astuteness, as she crouched enthralled on the "cricket.") "'Twas said that the dear Queen had a robe garnished with the same lace which had been given her by Her Royal Highness, the Duchess." (Dempsy wriggled again.) "But there's a tale of sentiment goes with it also, me dear. 'Twas at a dance, when I was 'sweet and twenty,' that a bit of the same lace caught on the button of the gentleman I named just now —Mortimer Smith—a very gifted, poetical man. And what must he needs do but embody me poor, torn scrap in the poem I alluded to. 'Tis too long to repeat entire before dinner, but I will quote the one stanza.

> 'That rustic flow'r, Queen Charlotte's lace,
> Hath in my heart's herbarium place,
> For of that heart is Charlotte queen,
> And now her lace may there be seen.'

'Tis daintily put, do you not think so?"

"It's quite too *utterly* charming!" cried Dempsy, her appreciative eyes twinkling like a marmoset's. "Mind you

say the whole of it to me sometime. Now you won't forget, *will* you? How does it begin?"

And Aunt Charlotte, beating time with her little hand, all crisscrossed with a high relief of slippery lilac veins, and followed in its motions by the swinging handkerchief, began to recite,—"Charlotte to praise thee,—charms like thine——"

In the meantime Sally and Richard had entered and, just as Aunt Charlotte pronounced "immortal powers," Jonathan announced dinner.

All at once, as Phoebe saw Richard entering the room for the second time that day, a perfect, calm self-possession came to her. It was a phenomenon something like that which causes a condemned man, who has sweated and trembled in his cell from mortal fear, to face the sight of the gallows on which he is to die with entire fortitude.

"Come, Dempsy, dear," she called, "I know just how fascinating Aunt Charlotte is, but we're going to be very grand and ceremonious tonight in your honour, and Owen's waiting to take you in."

She stood smiling, her hand on the rector's arm, while they all filed past her into the lovely central hall, with its white panelling and old silver lustres now winking with candles. (All the doorknobs and locks and fixtures for light at World's-End were of silver, as in a few old Virginian houses.)

And, as she watched them, it seemed to her that they were figures in her dream, and that of this dream she was mistress for the time being, for this evening, at least, and could control them as she pleased. It was an odd, encouraging sensation, akin to that feeling of universal power which the first taste of opium sometimes gives. The poppy of desperation had excited rather than dulled her.

So the little procession went by as she had ordered it—Owen and Dempsy, Sally and Mr. Nelson, Mary and Richard, Charles Patton with Aunt Charlotte, and then she followed with the rector—the shepherdess of dreams marshalling her flock.

The native soup which Phoebe had ordered, thinking it would be an "amusing" food to Dempsy, met with great success.

"Phoebe! what utterly 'deevy' soup!" she cried.

"What is all this delicious, slimy stuff that looks like glue and tastes like heaven?"

"Okra," said Phoebe, laughing.

"Not *yellow* ochre?"

Dempsy's face was a study; everybody laughed now.

"No, *okra,*" said Phoebe. "It's a vegetable, not a mineral."

"That sounds as if we were playing that dear, stupid game of 'twenty questions,'" returned Dempsy. "You must give me tons to take back to England with me."

"Phoebe looks rather different from what she did the last time you saw her, doesn't she, Cousin Henry?" asked Mary of the rector, across the table.

"Indeed, I was just saying as much to her, before dinner," he answered. "A paler bride I never saw, and I'm rather a connoisseur in brides."

"Do you prefer them 'blushing like the dawn?'" asked Patton.

"No. I confess that a pale bride appeals to me particularly. There is something pure and maidenly in such pallor that makes it touchingly appropriate. Our little Phoebe here was the picture of virginal sweetness. Like a little snowdrop. Now 'red as a rose is she,' and quite as becomingly."

"Poor, dear child, she'll be red as a garden of roses if you go on with your ruthless personalities, Cousin Henry," said Mary, kindly refraining from looking at Phoebe, who, as a matter of fact, had gone white.

"Dear me! Are compliments no longer in fashion?" asked the rector, smiling. "I surely thought the old kinsman who married her could praise his little cousin without confusing her."

"You haven't confused me, dear Cousin Henry," said Phoebe, very low to him. "All that you said was dear and kind."

"She's recovered, Henry," said Charles Patton teasingly, "but she actually paled for a moment under the impact of your sonorous praise. 'And that reminds me,' as our national anecdote-tellers say, of a line of poetry that I read the other day and thought quite unique. It ran thus: 'Aurora's fair, flushed face some paler grew.'—That 'some paler' is powerfully idiomatic, don't you think so?"

"Your poet was certainly from Yankee-land, I know *that* much," smiled Mary.

Dempsy was trying again to engage Richard in conversation, or rather to "bally-rag him into uttering," as she afterwards told Phoebe.

"Don't you think your aunt-in-law is the loveliest thing in that black frock that you ever looked at?" she asked, surreptitiously hiding in her napkin a bit of the "corn pone" which had been served with the soup, also in concession to her well-known love of novelty, and which she ungratefully considered "quite the nastiest thing that she had ever tasted."

"Very handsome," said Richard in his noncommittal voice. He disliked Dempsy exceedingly. Not only did she jar on his æsthetic sensibilities, but she was the cause, albeit ignorant, of his present odious position.

Dempsy looked at him, and then laughed, as though at a secret and amusing thought of her own.

Richard grew pale with anger, but merely turned to Mary with some banal remark.

"Virginia," here sounded the high, shrill pipe of Aunt Charlotte, replying to some remark of her nephew's, "Virginia is not only going to the dogs, me dear Thomas,—she's already in the kennel and the door stuffed with straw. What with her political messes and women 'boying it' like stage Cleopatras of Shakespeare's day—she's done for, me good Thomas, done for!—I'd rather be a female dog and bay the moon than a modern Virginian woman . . . a 'suffragette!' "

This last word was spat forth with quintessential venom.

"My dear aunt . . . my dear aunt . . . pray consider the surroundings . . . temper your speech, I implore you," expostulated the old gentleman in a low, agitated voice.

"Pooh! Rubbish! Ye're more of an old woman than I am, me poor Thomas; ye should sup on posset with your timorous shanks in a mustard footbath," she growled in response, the one subject that ever ruffled her otherwise serene temper being the question of "women's rights," which Patton unfortunately had brought up.

"My dear aunt . . . let me beseech you . . . on this happy occasion. . . . A controversy of personal animosity would so painfully jar . . ."

"Painfully fiddlesticks!" said the irate old dame. "Is a body to sit mumchance while Charles Patton airs his retrograde ideas? How do ye know but he'll contaminate Phoebe, and she'll evince her precious 'rights' by becoming a disciple of yon dog Malthus, and refusing to bear her husband an heir!"

"Aunt Charlotte—if you have one scintilla of consideration for me and mine, you will desist at once," said her nephew, hoarse and purplish with apprehension. "Your language has a flavour of the eighteenth century, which would only cause discomfort to an assembly of the twentieth."

His incensed relative gave a sibilant sniff and, turning on him her plump shoulder with its edging of straw-embroidered lace, engaged Owen with some remark on another subject.

But Richard had not escaped from the subject of Phoebe by resorting to Mary's soothing if not congenial atmosphere after the friction of Dempsy's electric, eel-like personality.

"I'm so proud of my little cousin, Richard," she said to him at once. "I wonder if you find the change in her as marked as I do?"

"She is more beautiful than she was," said Richard.

"Yes, isn't she?—A happy marriage is like some wonderful spell. She has bloomed out under it like a flower in a magician's garden. But, now that I think of it, you don't believe in marriage, do you?"

"Not for myself."

"One could scarcely help believing in it for Phoebe, could one?"

"No. Scarcely."

"How monosyllabic you are tonight," she smiled. "Isn't Miss Torrance to have the benefit of some of your paradoxes?"

Richard frowned.

"That girl is detestable . . . a cornucopia of every British philistinism."

"Poor Miss Torrance! And I thought her so very nice."

"To me," said Richard, "she is insufferable. The sort of woman who would wear a pugree on her hat in India, and maim tigers."

"But it's very sensible to wear a pugree on one's hat

in India, isn't it?" said Mary, who couldn't refrain from goading him a little.

"I should have said that she'd wear a pugree on her mind. That expresses my meaning better," retorted Richard with his sneer.

Patton here said something to Mary, and Richard was left to his own thoughts, for Dempsy was deep in consultation with Owen about tomorrow's hunt.

And thus left in peace, if what Richard felt could by any stretch be called "peace,"—he sat looking moodily at the great, pollen-dusted plumes of Mary's *épergne* of golden-rod, yet seeing Phoebe clearly, though his black eyes seemed absorbed with the flowers.

He saw that red mouth which had melted and quivered under his own that May night after the storm,—when that other crueller storm had gathered in him, blowing reason and pity before it like windle-straw;—the shining hair, with which he had laced her to him, now glowing in a bright crown as of wifehood, above the eyes which had once gazed at him with shy adoration, and which now when they had rested on his face for an instant had been filled with a frozen repulsion;—the lovely throat,—the little breasts that had beat against his like scared birds, just showing timidly above the soft black of her bodice. All these things,—now by right another man's,—he saw with those sullen, veiled eyes of his that seemed only to gaze at the great, yellow field-flowers. And a sick, torpid anger began to stir him,—the anger that might come to a man who has thrown aside a ruby, thinking it a bit of glass, and then sees that another, with more knowledge, has picked it from the dust and set it fittingly.

He did not care for rubies actually or symbolically,—yet it was irritating to think that he had mistaken one for glass. A curious, infinitely base feeling of secret triumph stole in among the sluggish current of his anger,—the feeling that he had first tarnished what the other man now cherished.

He glanced with his secretive, opaque eyes at Owen, and, strangely enough, Owen at the same moment looked at him.

Richard's hand clenched under the table,—his chin jerked sideways with that inherited trick.

"You are not coruscating tonight, my dear Richard," Owen permitted himself the slight malevolence of saying.

"We counted on you to impress Miss Torrance with Young America's brilliancy."

Dempsy gave that little provoking laugh of hers.

"*I* believe he's in the silent stage of being in love," she said. "I believe he's dreadfully in love with someone at this very table!"

Black fangs of light seemed to leap from Richard's eyes. He could have struck Dempsy on the mouth with joy.

"Can one blame him?" asked Owen serenely.

"No . . . and I'm really awfully sorry for him," pursued Dempsy maliciously. "It must be frightfully hard on a man to be in love with some one who's so horribly in love with her own husband."

Richard had turned away again. Now he ventured to glance once directly at Phoebe. She was listening earnestly to something that Charles Patton was saying, her elbow on the table, her chin resting on her palm. This was a new thought to Richard, this idea of her being in love with his uncle. It had never crossed his mind before. He had understood, as he had told his mother, how impossible it had been for one in Phoebe's situation to refuse such an offer of salvation as Owen's had been,——but that she gave him anything but a grateful regard had never occurred to him for an instant. Could it be possible? Did that soft, *amoureuse* mouth melt for Owen now as it had once done for him?—Could a woman feel another passion so quickly?—Was it possible? . . . Had that spiteful little English minx hit upon the truth? As though hypnotised by his black eyes, which he had forgotten to withdraw in the absorption of his thought, Phoebe moved restlessly,—glanced right and then left, then full at him.

Into her eyes,—into her whole face—came a sick, cold look, a look that he had once seen in them when, after a rainy day at Nelson's Gift, one of the loathsome centipedes that infest rotten wood had crawled out along the step of the front porch.

Quickly she looked away,—straight this time at her husband, a look of dumb, strained appeal, as though for help. And suddenly there floated over her white face the loveliest warm rose. Instinctively he glanced back at Owen. Yes,—those gold-grey eyes were answering hers,——signalling some strong aid, some potent, secret force that had sent the bright blood welling upward from her heart;—

and now, again glancing at her, he saw on her face and in her great, dilated eyes the look of one who regards divinity. Love, a passionate gratitude, but chiefly that full, rapt glow of adoration, lit the eyes that had just shrunk away from his as from some noxious reptile.

Once more he glanced at Owen. Somehow he did not at all fit the simile of the Praying Mantis; the husband's motley sat on him like a holiday garment. Mated lions, Richard reflected grudgingly, are not undignified, and there was something in those tawny eyes of his uncle that reminded him now of a lion's eyes. He recalled how, having been delayed once in Marseilles, he had strolled out to the zoological gardens, and stopped fascinated by a cage where a Numidian lion and his mate had not long been confined.

It had been autumn, and the two great beasts were sunning themselves in their small courtyard under an aspen. The brown, crisp leaves floated down continually through the mild air, and the lioness, lying on her back, struck at them lazily with her big cushiony paws, just as a kitten might have done. Couched beside her, like some huge, heraldic beast, the lion watched her with his golden eyes from under the black pomp of his mane. Now and then he would gently lick her shoulder, as she might have licked the hide of one of her cubs, and in those steady golden eyes of the male was the softness of a creature regarding its young, rather than of the desert king looking upon his mate.

Just this look was in Owen's steady, softened eyes as he glanced at Phoebe. Richard had seen such a look often in his own mother's eyes when she wished to reassure him in some pain or anxiety.

Then his glance happened to fall from Owen's eyes to his hand, which was resting on the edge of the table. It was a large hand, even for his great size,—long, broad, and well shaped, but constructed for strength like some cunning machine made for gripping and crushing. The bones, supplely knit together, showed plainly under the dark surface; the broad wrist and back were covered with short, dark hair like those of a son of Anak.

Richard looked from it to his own delicately modelled hand, smooth and fine as a bit of old ivory. The thought came to him how that big, hairy hand lying relaxed there on the polished surface of the table could crush his own

hand to pulp, merely by grinding it in one steady grasp. Men must have had such hands in the stone-age, he thought, irritated by its primitive strength and hairiness. He remembered the story of a man of just such abnormal power as Owen, who had torn the muscle from an enemy's arm as a child rips the pith from an orange. He shivered slightly and, forcing his eyes away from the dark, quiet hand, which seemed to mesmerise them, saw that his mother was looking at him with furtive nervousness.

He tried to smile at her, but his chin only jerked sideways. If that hand were ever to grasp in anger at his throat . . . if by some fatality Owen ever knew. . . .

There was a subdued noise of chairs being pushed back. Phoebe had signalled to Dempsy with the little smiling nod that signifies dinner is over.

XLI

CHARLES PATTON was the only friend with whom Owen was really intimate. There were several men whom he was fond of, and many whom he liked very well indeed, but only with Patton did he ever speak of things very close to him. He was glad, therefore, when Patton stayed on after the rector had gone, saying that, as there would be a moon at eleven, he would stop for a "crack" with him, as his friend. Andrew Graeme, put it.

Mr. Nelson always went to bed at ten, and tonight all the women had retired when he did, so that Owen and Patton found themselves free to go to the former's study and take each a big, leather armchair before the fire that Jonathan had just heaped with fresh logs of "red-heart" cedar.

With pipes lighted and legs crossed, they grinned at each other affectionately.

"This is something like, old man," said Patton. "As inspiring as the ladies are, for solid comfort give me a pipe, a wood-fire and my chum."

"It's good to see your gloomy old mug again, Charles. Now tell me about Sally. How serious is it?"

Patton took the pipe from his mouth and scrutinised it thoughtfully; then, as if assured that it was the same old briar, he put it back again.

"Anything with the heart is serious, my dear fellow. But there's no reason, with proper care, why Sally shouldn't live along as comfortably as most of us. Her trouble is valvular.—I won't go into scientific terminology—a weakness of the right valve. But those attacks of angina pectoris that she had so often in the beginning were chiefly due to hysteria, in my opinion. Sally will be fifty-three in March. That is rather a serious climacteric with some women, you know. And she's deucedly high-strung and high-tempered, if you'll excuse plain language. Works herself up over things,—lets herself go.—I've held forth with considerable force on that subject, and I believe I've rather impressed her. Any sort of inner commotion is bad for her. If people only realised the direct pathological connection of a bad temper with the arterial system, there'd be many more angels in our houses."

Owen smoked for some seconds in silence, then he said:

"You talk such a lot, Charles, I believe that poor Sally is worse off than you want to admit."

"Well . . . a cantankerous heart-valve is not like a toothache," admitted Patton grudgingly. "She can't have it out like a troublesome molar, and she can't lead the exciting, helter-skelter life she's been used to. But with proper care . . . And then there's Miss Mary . . . she's been my right hand in all this. A splendid woman. Sally will listen to her when she simply walks through *my* orders like a circus girl through a hoop of paper. Her own sister couldn't have been better to Sally than that dear girl has been."

Owen's face grew soft.

"You can't give me news about Mary Talliaferro, Charles. There's no one quite like her. You and Mary—yes, you two,—well,—you make things worth while."

He looked round at Patton suddenly.

"Do you know, Charles? . . . I think your happiness may be there—and you just snoozing calmly like a bat hiding from the sunlight."

Patton, who, for all the simplicity of his nature, was a man of keen observation, smiled rather drily. "Miss Mary," said he, "has about as much idea of marrying anyone as she has of going to Timbuctoo as a missionary."

"She might make a mission of Charles Patton with

good results. Why, she's devoted to you. Mary isn't the kind to be head-over-heels in love. She's too sensible and balanced. You aren't looking for a Juliet, are you? Mary is Portia and Rosalind in one."

Patton thought:

"You're the bat, not I, old man," but Mary's secret, which he had divined long ago, was as safe with him as all those other secrets which sometimes weighed rather heavily on his kind, melancholy heart.

He said tranquilly:

"I'm no more the marrying type than Miss Mary,—bless her sweet heart. Nature turns out certain celibates with the bump of maternity, and paternity, and a depression where the bump of amorous activity should be. We're the sort,—she and I, who were born commissioned to look after the orphans,—those with parents as well as those without. Now we're mothering and fathering poor Sally. We haven't time to spare for amorous friskings."

"All the same . . ." began Owen.

"All the same, you're a dear old ass," said Patton cheerfully. "You'd break up a beautiful friendship to patch it into a makeshift marriage. It's the inveterate match-making instinct that afflicts all happy newly-weds."

"Perhaps so," said Owen, smiling, but he looked unconvinced.

"And you really think that Sally's in no immediate danger?" he asked, a moment later.

"I've said that any trouble with the heart is serious, but if she'll be reasonable she may outlast us both, old man. That is . . ."

"That is? . . ." Owen prompted.

"I've an idea," said Patton slowly, "that the gifted Richard gives her a devil of a lot of worry."

"Why do you think so?"

"Have you never caught her watching him?—I say 'caught her' because she does it with great caution. But from time to time,—when she thinks everyone is engaged with something else,—she looks at him in a heartbreakingly anxious sort of way. Haven't you noticed it?"

"Once or twice . . . yes, I think so."

"Do you know what the fellow's been up to?—I never 'cottoned to' Richard, as you're aware. Thank God, you're married to that dear girl.—Let's have a boy to break Richard's fine nose thoroughly, as soon as possible,

please. But do you know if Master Dickon has been in mischief?''

Owen knocked out his pipe against the chimney, and, taking up another, began filling it from the tobacco pouch that lay between them. ''You forget I've been abroad for over a year. Richard is rather a 'eanny' character, as a rule. What sort of mischief do you fancy would attract him?''

''Ah,'' said Patton, ''that is quite beyond me. The divagations of that young man's imagination are quite out of my scope. Something deeply, darkly, sinuously eccentric, I should say. But then, who knows? Those demi-semi-geniuses, with their finical scorn for the blunt, beaten paths of humanity, are just the chaps to succumb to a sudden seizure of commonplace brutality. They go about tricking out their anæmic phantasies in sorts of Montezuma cloaks of painted feathers, and presto! one fine day they wake to find themselves begigged over a squaw or a Lapland wench.''

''You really think Richard, with all his fastidiousness, capable of brutality?''

''I do,'' said Patton. ''It's all in the left side of his face,—only you're used to seeing both halves together.''

''Lombroso?'' asked Owen, looking rather surprised.

''Certainly not,'' said Patton. ''All the children of men, you and I among them, are asymmetric. But there's one half of the human face that always gives a person away. I don't know exactly when I first found it out,—long before it became popularly known, though. You must have seen examples of it in magazines. No?—Well,—get me some photographs—any, so that they're full-face,—and I'll show you.''

Owen opened a drawer in his desk, and took out a handful of photographs at random. Patton spread them out under the light of the double student's-lamp.

''Capital,'' he said; ''here's our hero himself, one of Sally, one of you. That's enough.''

He pushed the rest aside, and took an envelope from a case of letter paper.

''Now look here,'' he said, ''we'll do you first. What a shocking photo you make, by the way. Nearly all irregularly good-looking men do, I believe.''

''Charles, you overwhelm me!''

''Tut! you know very well you're good looking. If one

but touches your bieeps in friendship, you swell up like the strong man at a fair.—But look. D'ye see this?''

He placed the white envelope so that it cut the photographed face in two longitudinally.

''Now, on this side you're grave, melancholy, even soft-looking. See the droop of the lid and eyebrow? Idealism. The mouth-corner is almost womanish,—almost too sweet. *Now* look . . .''

He whipped the paper to the other side.

''By George! It's more marked in you than in most people. Look at that left eye!—Hard, implacable,—almost as ruthless as Sally's in one of her tantrums. And the mouth—there's savagery in it. See how the corner dips; grim, a stone-age mouth. Even the jaw has a different set from this side. Look how it juts. It's the face of a man who could run 'amok' under sufficient provocation . . . 'go Berserk.' ''

''It's extraordinary!'' exclaimed Owen, staring down at the unfamiliar side of his face, revealed to him thus unexpectedly as in a magic mirror. ''And, I must say, singularly unpleasant. When did you first do this, Charles?''

''Can't remember to save my life. I've tried often. I must have been a mere lad when I first chaneed upon it. Now we'll have a go at Sally. There—you see? This side merely thoughtful, the eye mild, the wing of the lip gentle, candid. Now this other. Look at the temper in that slightly drawn-up under lid. Look at the lines of the mouth, straight and thin as a crack. And the forehead—even under the photographer's touchings-up you can see the nervous, petulant drawing of the frontal museles. There's Sally, the worst enemy of her own heart —to her secret life. *Now* we'll have young Baudelaire—Mallarmé. Come—this side shows up better than I thought. Eye quite straightforward and affectionate, mouth composed,—nostril a little stingy, but not over mean. Now let's see the worst of him. By Jingo! Owen, look at that eye and mouth and nostril. There's nothing subtle there,—Caliban dressed in velvet,—that's what. Yet not Simon-pure Caliban, either,—it hasn't enough force for that. A by-blow of Caliban got on Shelley's Witch of Atlas. But there's brutality, all the same, just as I thought.''

He put his great, spatulate thumb on the corner of

the photographed mouth. "See that squaring out of the lip just here, like the mouth in a Greek mask of Comedy? In a human face that means brutality of the cheap kind. The sort that will sputter out in unexpected words, or take refuge in a mean passivity. Poof!—I like you less than ever, young gentleman."

And he flipped the photograph from him and went again to his armchair.

"Interesting, though,—isn't it?" he said.

"Very. But rather depressing. I knew I had a devil somewhere in me, but I didn't know that he showed in my face before."

"Cheer up. He doesn't when your two halves are looked at together, and that's the way people always see one."

"And you're not a disciple of Lombroso?"

"No. The theory's too good to be true."

"And what of Nordau?"

"A granny!—Green specs, yellow specs, black specs. A pinch of experience will hoist a stellar system of theory."

They both smoked in silence for some minutes, then Patton said:

"You don't know, old man, how glad I am to see you so happy."

"Thanks, Charles. I am happy."

"Without reservations?"

"I can't help being worried about Sally. And . . ." He hesitated. "Well, Richard isn't exactly a joy in my life, I confess. I blame myself about him, Charles."

"In what way?"

"I think I might have helped him to be . . . well . . . something more genuine than he is."

"No, sir. . . . He came a waxwork from his mother's womb, and he'll return to nature's matrix a waxwork."

"You contradict yourself, my dear chap. A waxwork can't be brutal."

"Yes, it can,—if its works get out of order. A waxwork individual off the track is as destructive sometimes as a 'wild engine.'"

"You think Richard is in danger of being *détraqué?*"

"I'm going by the look in Sally's eyes when she watches him on the sly."

Owen clasped both hands behind his head and gave a

long stretch, looking up at the blended rounds of light cast by the double lamp on the ceiling. Then he sat up suddenly. The reflection of a lamp on the ceiling always recalled that terrible day of little Diana's birth.

"Well, old man," said Charles Patton, looking at him with whimsical affection, "what wasp stung you then?"

Leaning forward, Owen knocked out his second pipe and laid it aside.

"I'll tell you what harries me like the deuce, Charles," he said. "It's the idea that poor Sally's disappointment over Richard's prospects may have a lot to do with this sudden development of heart trouble. I've been twisting and turning it every way. Of course . . . as it is . . ."

"As it is, you've married one of the sweetest young creatures in the world, and your money will naturally go to her children," said Patton bluntly.

"Not all, Charles. That wouldn't be playing a fair game."

Patton grunted.

"You know it wouldn't, Charles."

"Well . . . perhaps," admitted Patton with another grunt. "What do you propose doing?"

"That's exactly what I want to talk over with you."

Patton glanced at him sharply.

"You don't propose increasing Richard's allowance, I hope?"

"No. But I thought of making a provision in my will that would leave him with a good income. I thought that when I had decided on the amount and got everything in shape it might comfort Sally to let her see it."

"Mph!" grunted his friend a third time. "And what may be the amount you've decided on?"

"I haven't decided yet, old Crusty. That's where I want your advice."

"My advice," said Patton, speaking with his teeth on the mouthpiece of his pipe, "my advice,—if waxworks could swim,—would be to chuck him out into the stream of things, sink or swim, and let him test his precious talents on their bread-winning value."

"No, no, old fellow. You can't bring up a lad as I've helped to bring up Richard and then chuck him out without a penny. Come, Charles, be practical. How much should you say?—And, when we've settled that, tell me

your opinion about reassuring Sally by letting her see my will."

By the time they had hammered this out between them, and Patton had said, with some sarcasm, that he thought the sight of what Owen had finally decided that Richard should inherit would be an excellent heart-tonic even for a moribund,—it was long past eleven o'clock.

Owen stood on the North Portico until Patton had ridden off, and then, leaving Jonathan to shoot home the big bolts, went upstairs cautiously, so as not to disturb the sleeping house.

Seeing a light under Phoebe's door, he knocked softly,—waited, then knocked again. Feeling sure that she was not there, he turned the knob and went in. The fire had sunk into a mass of glowing coals over which flickered delicate blue and lilac flames veined with gold. On a little table by the sofa a lamp under its shade of white silk burned low. The room was warm and sweet with the fragrance of cedar-wood and powdered orris. One of the windows had been left open, and the woodsy, pungent breath of the October night mingled with the languid air within.

Already the room was saturated with Phoebe's personality. It looked to him familiar and yet strange, like a well-known face under a new headdress. Everywhere lay the pretty articles that were as characteristic of her as her eyes and hair; the bag of white silk embroidered with wild roses that held her bedroom slippers by day,—the white Angora rug thrown back upon the sofa;—the little lace and batiste pillow upon the larger cushion; the ivory paper-cutter with "P. R." in turquoises that he had given her shortly after their marriage;—the ivory brushes and boxes on her dressing table, marked in the same way—that sweet, pure scent of orris.

The hollowed bracken where a doe has been couching does not speak more clearly of its late occupant than Phoebe's bedroom spoke of her. And as he looked tenderly about him the arm of the pretty nightdress of rose batiste—that America had laid ready on the sofa to catch the fire glow,—waved softly in the draught from the window like something stirring in sleep.

Owen put out his hand and touched it gently, smiling. Then, noticing the little rose-coloured *mules* that stood on the white hearth-rug in the "first position" for danc-

ing, he picked one up and set it on his palm. The Cinderella shoe lay on his big palm like a quaint slipper-orchid. It was shaped by Phoebe's foot,—he could see the moulding of the slim toes in the rose silk, and, lifting it, he kissed it, smiling again.

The door opened, and the hanging sleeve waved beckoningly in the increased draught. It was Phoebe who came in, her bedroom candle still lighted in her hand. She was in her dressing-gown, with hair unbraided, and she looked very pale now.

"I've been with Dempsy all this time," she said, coming over to the fire. "She's such a chatterbox. . . . I couldn't get away. Is it very late?"

"Almost midnight. You look tired, my darling. Come rest here a minute."

He put her on the sofa, drew the fur over her and closed the window. Then he came and sat beside her. "I only wanted to tell you how charming you were tonight, sweetheart. I thought you'd be asleep long ago."

She played with his hand without looking at him. "No. . . . I have such a headache. I couldn't have slept, anyway."

"Poor dear!" He bent over and kissed her hair. "Can't I play maid? Won't you go to bed at once?"

He thought of the heartache which that "headache" stood for, and longed to gather her to his own heart and comfort her, but he refrained. For her, as well as for him, he thought, any expression of physical love with that other under the same roof would be abhorrent. And, watching her face with its lowered, nervously quivering eyelids, he felt that some special struggle was taking place in her. "There, darling," he said, suddenly rising. "I'll go and undress, and you get into bed as fast as ever you can."

Her lips parted, closed, parted again, and now the colour flew into her face. She took his hand in both hers and held it to her cheek.

"What is it, dear?" he asked.

"I . . . I thought . . . it is only . . . I . . . my head does ache so dreadfully. . . . If you don't mind . . . perhaps I could . . . I would sleep better . . . by myself."

He understood at once. With that other in the house she could not bear him to be near her as her husband. He answered quickly:

"You're quite right, sweetheart. I'll run off at once. You're sure I can't do anything before I go?"

She kissed his hand almost timidly—the merest soft brush with closed lips—a little, staid caress, like the kiss bestowed on royalty's hand at a court function.

"No . . ." she said very low. "Oh, yes—yes!" she cried, suddenly starting up, her clasped hands against his breast. "You can tell me I don't make you unhappy . . . that you're not disappointed in me. . . . Don't tell me if it isn't true. . . . But if you could. . . ."

He put his arm about her and pressed her head down against his heart.

"Do you hear that talking under your ear, child?"

"Yes . . . yes. . . ."

"It speaks better than I can. Every beat is a throb of joy because you're in it."

"Oh, I can sleep now! . . . I can sleep . . ." she cried, and burst into sudden weeping.

He held her close without a word, and for some moments she wept on softly, piteously, like a child who has been forgiven, but that cannot forgive itself.

Breakfast was early the next morning, as it had been decided that Richard and Dempsy should put in a day with the Warwick Hounds, and the meet was 10.30 and four miles distant.

As much as he disliked the English girl, he welcomed this natural escape from the impossible situation at World's-End. Dempsy was to ride The Clown and he a clever hunter of Owen's called "Paternoster." It irritated and humiliated him under the circumstances to ride his uncle's horse, but Borak had cast a shoe and there was no way out.

Sunlight slanted in between the white columns through the plants and flowers in the quaint, narrow conservatory that ran across the east wing in front of the dining-room. It fell in a quivering skein over the dark mirror of the round table with its mats of old Flemish lace and central dish of butter wreathed in forced nasturtiums.

Behind the Sheffield urn, so familiar from his boyhood, Phoebe sat making coffee as he had been used always to see his mother.

Perhaps nothing since his arrival the night before had given him such a sense of inextricably tangled reality and unreality as the sight of those energetic white little hands

grasping the black handle of the old urn that the long, sallow hands had so long been accustomed to wield. He glanced at his mother; she was slowly shredding a nasturtium flower, looking down at it as she did so. And he knew,—from the strangely tense bond of sympathy that knit them together like an umbilical cord of the spirit,—that this making of coffee in the old Sheffield urn by Phoebe was one of those bitternesses, so grievously disproportionate to their size, which are as hard to bear sometimes as matters far more weighty.

And for himself, too, it was a bitter thing to see her there in his mother's place, the girl that he had thought, at best, to maintain in decent comfort as his mistress,—sitting there as mistress not of him, but of the beautiful old house that he had always looked upon as his, and that had now passed from him irrevocably.

In the clear light of morning, in her simple coat and skirt of mouse-coloured velveteen, with her hair coiled low, English fashion, at the back of her head, the vital change in her struck him somehow more even than it had done the night before. For all the soft contours of her youth, it was a woman who sat there quietly and deftly making coffee for her guests, not the excitable, shy country girl that he had known. Experience, sad, and deep, and vital, had left the sign of its sharp chrism on flesh and spirit. And Richard, who had once been able to divine her thoughts from her expression almost as surely as he had divined his mother's just now, wondered what was passing behind the clear, broad forehead, under the "widow's-peak" of sorrel hair.

It was a strange, singularly unpleasant sensation to be loathed. To be sharply disliked he had often found stimulating,—but the look that he had surprised on her face last evening,—that cold, sick look, as of someone happening to see a slimy reptile. . . . Richard's self-love and vanity writhed uneasily under the memory of that look. And, glancing at Dempsy, all *pimpante* and cocky in her smart Melton-cloth habit, he felt his hatred for her as the cause of his present dilemma increase tenfold.

She, in the meantime, quite aware of his antipathy, rather tickled by it and returning it "full measure pressed down and running over,"—seeing that her way of speaking and eating, merely of living, moving and having her being—irritated him to the utmost degree,—exaggerated

all her oddities of speech and manner, with the malicious delight of a little monkey out of reach, teasing some more dangerous creature.

"At least," she thought, "if the sulky beast won't talk, I'll get some fun by baiting him."

They went into the South Hall for cigarettes and pipes.

"Nine-thirty," said Owen, looking at his watch. "You've twenty minutes yet."

Dempsy took her cigarette from her mouth and called to Phoebe, who was standing with Mary at one of the windows:

"I *must* see that lamb awake before I go—do have her down here at once, like a dear."

"I think the nurse has gone out with her," said Phoebe. She wondered if she said this naturally,—such an inner trembling had seized her at Dempsy's words.

Mary, who was still looking out of window, tapped suddenly on the glass.

"There she is now!" she cried. She tapped sharply again and beckoned, nodding and smiling. "Giles was just going into the garden with her. She heard me. She's bringing the baby now, Miss Torrance."

As she spoke the front door opened and Giles came in with little Diana on her arm, looking like a puff of thistle-down in her fleecy white coat and cap.

"Oh, you duck! You lamb of love!" cried Dempsy, throwing away her cigarette and rushing at the baby. "Give her to me, nurse, do!—Why, she isn't a bit frightened! You love-duck! See what a lovely pony Dempsy makes!"

And she began a little gallopade down the hall with the child in her arms.

Diana was enchanted. She beat with her mittened hand on Dempsy's shoulder, and jumped in her arms as though she were gallopading too.

The girl pranced back with her, then, seating herself, took off the fluffy cap.

"Oh!" she cried, laughing, as the soft blowse of red-gold curls was revealed. "How ridiculous! She's just Phoebe seen through the wrong end of an opera glass. I never saw such an absurd likeness. And how strong she is!" she added, as the baby reared back, the better to absorb the new face looking down at her. "Does she walk yet?"

"No, miss," said Giles, who had stepped forward to take the cap. "But she crawls something wonderful. I do think as how she'll walk very shortly, miss, and her only eight months old come the twentieth of this month."

Dempsy set Diana promptly on the floor.

"I simply *must* see her crawl!" she exclaimed.

And at once little Di began a swift, crablike movement, planting her mittened hands firmly and using her small legs as though swimming.

Dempsy plumped down beside her, and accompanied her in the same manner across the hall. They brought up near Richard, who was standing by one of the hall tables not far from Owen.

"Da-da-da-da," said the baby, throwing her head back as she rested on her firm little arms, and staring up at him. Then a delicious smile broke all over her little face. She lifted one hand, and moved thumb and finger together in one of her imperious gestures.

"Da-da! Da-da!" she called.

"Bless me, goosie," said Dempsy. "*That* isn't your da-da. *There's* your da-da. . . ."

She took the baby's head in her hands and turned it towards Owen.

"It's a wise child that knows its own father," she laughed. "Fancy anyone taking you for anything so commonplace as a parent, Mr. Bryce!"

To herself she thought:

"Dear me! What a temper the brute has! I mustn't provoke him too far or he'll ride over me today or something."

She thought that Richard's pallor came from vexation. He stood gazing down at the child as though hypnotised. Diana made a plunge forward and caught his riding-boot in both arms, her head still thrown back, her pretty chuckle ringing.

"Oh . . . look at him!" laughed Dempsy, her impishness getting the better of her prudence. "*Do* look at him, everybody! He's positively scared to death!—Babyphobia!"

She sat back on her heels, revelling with malicious glee in the strange, perturbed expression on Richard's face, which certainly resembled terror. Suddenly she swooped on the baby, gathered her up and thrust her into his arms.

"Hold her! Hold her, man!—or she'll fall!" she cried,

convulsed with hoydenish laughter. "Oh! did you ever see anything so funny!"

And she stood back, with peal after peal of mirth, at the sight of Richard, white as his shirt, holding the baby awkwardly to him.

Owen had started forward, but, before he could get to Richard, Phoebe was there.

She gathered the child in her arms without a word, and, going over again to the window, began tapping softly on the glass to amuse it, her back to the others.

"Why—I believe Phoebe's vexed with me," said Dempsy in a crestfallen tone. She ran over to Phoebe. "*Please* don't be vexed with me, you dear thing," she said. "He wouldn't really have let her fall, you know. And, oh! it *was* so funny to see him in such a funk. He *did* look so absurd . . . and I'm sure he'd rather break his neck at the first fence today than look absurd for a second. Are you vexed, Phoebe?"

"No . . . I'm not vexed," said Phoebe almost inaudibly.

"You are!" retorted Dempsy, pouting. "I must say I didn't know you would get so miffed over such a little thing. I do think it's rather hard on me, Phoebe."

"I'm not . . . I'm not vexed . . . I swear I'm not," said Phoebe, with so much smothered passion in her voice that Dempsy was checked.

"The fact is, I'm a horrid little hoyden sometimes," she said penitently. "And that man does make me want to do the most idiotic things. But I really wouldn't have vexed you for the world."

"Oh, Dempsy!—Please . . ." said Phoebe, and there was something in her voice that made Dempsy turn away, saying:

"I should think we ought to be going on if that meet is at half-past ten."

While Dempsy had been talking with Phoebe, old Mr. Nelson, who had come downstairs after having toast and coffee in his bedroom, and had caught the last of Dempsy's singularly unfortunate tomboyish jesting with Richard, remarked, smiling: "Now that you've seen our little one, Mr. Bryce, do you not think that a portrait of Phoebe with her babe would far excel the one that you made of her with her tame crow? I confess that I should like to see you try your skill on such a pleasant subject."

Richard managed to reply that his hand was out of practice,—that he had been more absorbed in music than in painting for the last year.

Sally said:

"You remember that my brother did not think Richard capable of interpreting Phoebe's type, Mr. Nelson."

Her voice was not bitter, merely toneless. She was engaging the old gentleman in order to give Richard a chance to recover himself. The situation just then seemed as impossible to her as it had done to him the night before. And the expression on Owen's face as he had started forward to take the child from Richard had struck her as very singular.

This look stayed with her all day. It was out of the question that Owen should know anything. And yet there had been a look in his eyes. . . . Never, never had people been placed in so abominable, so monstrous a position as they two. . . . Yes, and Phoebe . . . she even found it in her heart to pity Phoebe just then. That must have been a moment of dreadful and humiliating anguish,—when she had seen her child in the arms of the man who was really its father, while the man who thought himself its father,—her husband,—stood looking on. Yes, she was to be pitied. "Poor, wretched girl," thought Sally. Then the reflex thought came swiftly. "She brought it on herself,—on us all. It's her own doing. I pity her, but I hate her, too."

It was fortunate for Richard that Dempsy was so subdued by the failure of her jest that she trotted to the meet in almost unbroken silence. He rode beside her as silently, his face set and his hands cold in their dogskin gloves. That contact of his child's flesh, about which his mother had warned him, had not roused in him the feeling which she had foreseen. A chill horror and revulsion had filled him. There, living, breathing, clutching him with imperious, strong little hands,—was his pleasant sin of a moment clothed in flesh and blood. There, his own creation, was what stood between him and his whole future. The child's beauty, which the artist in him recognised at once, seemed a diabolical irony. It was as if fate had said: "You prefer things exquisite? Very well—here is stark fact for you dressed out like a flower."

A moment—one moment of madness—and lo!—a liv-

ing being moved and breathed to destined ends,—a part of himself, yet separate as only one individual is separate from another.

XLII

RICHARD went to his mother's room that night after everyone had retired.

She looked very thin and ill in her dressing-gown of dark violet brocade.

"Do you feel up to a talk, mother?" he said, hesitating.

"Yes—quite. I've some things that I must say to you."

"And I to you. I never spent such a day. It's been almost as hard for you, I know."

"Yes," said his mother, looking up at him and turning the rings, now so loose, round and round on her emaciated fingers.

Richard bent, and lifted her hand to his lips. It was his favourite way of expressing his tenderness for her.

"There's something I want to ask you, but I hate to suggest anything that may trouble you."

She gave a tired sigh.

"There's no use trying to shirk things at this pass, Richard. I think I feel better for having you to speak out to. What is it that you want to ask?"

He sat down in the easy chair drawn up near hers, and rested both arms on the side next her. Leaning close to her, he said very low:

"Mother . . . has it ever occurred to you that Uncle Owen suspects . . . something?"

Sally's hand went to her side.

They sat looking at each other fixedly. Then she said in a voice as low as his:

"Yes—this morning—when she took the child from you—I thought—I noticed a strange expression in her eyes—as if——"

She shivered, leaving the sentence unfinished.

Richard gazed sombrely down at his folded arms. "I didn't notice that—I was too——"

He also broke off.

A curious gleam crossed his mother's face. "What did you feel—when you held your child, Richard?"

He answered thickly:

"It wasn't as you think.—It was horrible——"

"Yes—perhaps a man would feel that way—at first," she said with some coldness.

"It was horrible," he repeated. "It was like touching one's own hand between sleep and waking, and thinking it someone else's hand. Yes—that sort of feeling——"

"But the child's beautiful—as I said."

"That only makes it more savagely ironical, somehow."

His mother said in a peculiar tone:

"Perhaps it's just as well you don't feel drawn to it . . . it might add to your suffering."

"Yes—let's thank the gods I'm not paternal," he said with cynical frankness. "That would be the last straw."

He was staring at the fire, and so did not see the look of hostility that flashed into his mother's eyes for an instant.

"Poor boy," she said gently the next moment. "After all, it's only natural when one thinks——"

They sat silent again. Then Richard began abruptly:

"But, mother—about my uncle. You say you noticed something in his look this morning. And ever since I came there's been something in his manner,– something undefined but chilling—a sort of restraint, as though he were coercing himself to speak to me and look at me. It's impossible,—don't you think so?—that he could guess at even part of the truth?"

"Yes," said Sally slowly. "I don't believe even his will—and he's got the will of giants—could restrain him if he knew."

"Then what do you think it is?"

"I don't know. But there are strange things in life that no one understands. Perhaps, without knowledge, his instinct makes him shrink from you. Yes,—I think it's an instinctive feeling."

"It's there—whatever it is," he said gloomily.

"Yes, it's there."

Again there was silence. Richard bent over and threw a fresh log on the fire from the willow basket near the hearth. A cloud of sparks like a swarm of gilded gnats fled up the chimney.

"How is it all to end?" he asked bitterly, leaning back again. "I can't keep this up, mother—no mortal could. It would take some being with nerves like steel-filings and

bowels of brass to act out such a hideous, abominable farce. And do you think that even if *I* could keep it up—*she* could?—Mother—we've got to face it. It's impossible. If he's got some instinctive feeling against me now, what will it grow into with time?"

He rose and began moving softly to and fro, picking his feet up and placing them carefully again, like a cat walking through wet grass,—watching them as he did so,—his chin jerking nervously sideways every now and then. He came and stood near her again.

"Why, good God! did you see her face today when she took the child from me? That was enough to set any man thinking. You've said they'll merely think she has an antipathy for me. Yes—but one doesn't snatch away a child as from a leper just because one feels antipathy. I tell you, mother, we're all walking on a crust of lava."

Sally looked up at him, and her brows worked nervously.

"Well,—but what can we do?"

"If you'd only agree to let me drop it by degrees——" He broke off and said in an excited whisper:

"I can't stand it, mother. I tell you no man could stand it. The degradation of it is appalling. Am I to lap mud for dead men's shoes?"

"Richard—Richard——"

"You've never had anyone look at you as though you were offal——" he went on violently. "By God . . ."

"Richard . . . Richard . . ." she said again.

He threw himself down beside her and buried his face in her hands, holding them close with both his own.

"Mother," he stammered into her soft, hot palms that smelt faintly of vervaine. "There are things you don't understand—I can't tell you. But when she looks at me like that—a devil—a cold devil stirs in me."

Sally grew pale.

She drew her hands sharply from under his face and set them on his shoulders. Shaking them slightly, she said in a harsh voice:

"Richard! Control yourself! You're acting like an hysterical woman."

He lifted a distorted face to hers and gave his short, cynical laugh.

"By God!" he said again. "No woman ever felt as I do."

"You speak like an insane person!" she exclaimed, trying to sober him by her glacial tone, but he only gave another of those short, grating laughs.

"I never claimed inviolate sanity," he retorted. "And what I've been through today might unbalance a more phlegmatic mind than I have."

Sally's heart began to beat painfully. She tried another tone with him.

"If you'll only be a little patient, Richard. I've told you this is the worst. It will never, never be as hard as this again."

He sprang to his feet and resumed that catlike prowling. Just so Sally herself had prowled about this very room after Owen had told her of his coming marriage with Phoebe. She saw herself, with her dark, unbridled temper, in her son, and her painfully throbbing heart sank within her. And what did he mean—what dark, dreadful thing lay hid in his words about a "cold devil" stirring in him when Phoebe looked at him? She gazed at the set, ivory-hued face, with its opaque black eyes and brooding brows,—and something that she had never noticed in it before, a second personality, as it were, seemed to look with a stranger's look from that familiar face of her first-born,—her only son. Yes,—as closely as they were knit, as near as he had always been to her,—the severance of individuality put out its cold, strong arm, thrusting her away,—thrusting her out from the inner secret of his present mood.

Desperately she tried yet another tone with him. "My son," she said softly, "come here beside me again and let us see if together we can't think of some solution."

He came as she asked, and sat down again in the armchair, but, though his face was now composed, its pale mask shut her out from the core of himself hidden far beneath it.

"You see, dear," she began in a practical voice, "it isn't as if you were striving for a favour. It is your rights—your *rights*—that are in question."

He answered in an even, colourless voice.

"You forget. I've passed on my rights."

"No, Richard. Your folly has cost you a great fortune, but by right a part of it is still yours. No matter what you have done,—nothing can destroy your right to a part at least of your grandfather's money."

He looked oddly immovable.

"You see," he said, "my own father had the misfortune to lose that part of my grandfather's money which I had a direct right to."

The calm lucidity of this reasoning irritated his mother.

"No," she said with bitter feeling. "His fortune was too unevenly divided for that. I know Owen. I know that with his ideas he *must* provide justly for you—that is, if you do not lose your head altogether."

"All the same, it's degrading," he said between his teeth.

She felt sharp anger against him for a moment.

"I suppose you will not deny me a sense of honour," she remarked drily. "And I say that to act like a rational being in order to secure what is your own by every moral law is not degrading in any sense."

"I think," said Richard, smiling at the fire,—"I do think, mother,—that the less we say about moral law in this matter the better."

Sally flushed to her hair.

She said, after a moment's pause, under her breath, "You must indeed be suffering to be willing to wound me so cruelly."

Richard was on his knees beside her in an instant.

"Mother! you oughtn't to be angry. You ought to like it in me that I can think more of my own sense of decency than of some wretched thousands."

"I do—I do——" she said soothingly, melted by the desperation in his voice. "But that makes me all the more anxious to protect you against yourself. Against this mistaken, quixotic mood you're in. You may think me cynical, my poor boy, but I tell you from the bottom of a bitter experience that there is no grief that money cannot assuage. Don't mistake me," she put in quickly, as she felt his arm twitch under her hand. "I don't mean repay—wipe out—but in years to come,—when, instead of a wretched, anxious poverty, you look out at life from the comfortable window of means,—you will thank me. You will say: 'Yes, my mother knew best.'—Oh, you will! You will!—Believe me—for your own sake believe me, my dear, dear son."

Her thin arms were round him, pressing him close to her, and her cheek was upon his hair.

He knelt, holding her in silence, then he said:

"Don't you suppose I know that your every thought is for my good, mother? It's only that this thing—this damnable thing—seems beyond my power of endurance."

She stroked his hair, still holding him to her. "Tell me—tell me everything, darling," she coaxed, as though he were a little boy again, struggling with some secret that he longed yet was ashamed to confide to her. "Is it—it can't be that you—that she still has——"

"I can't explain it—you wouldn't understand," he muttered. "I wouldn't want you to understand."

"She has some—attraction for you still?"

She felt his forehead damp under her caressing hand.

"It's the attraction of repulsion—when she looks at me like that—as if I were refuse."

"Hush! hush!" murmured she, soothing him.

"You wouldn't understand even if I could explain."

"You mean that whatever love you had for her has turned to hatred?"

"I mean," he said in that thick voice which evinced overwhelming emotion with him, "I should like to—to humiliate her—to the utmost——"

"Hush! hush!" crooned Sally, rocking his head against her breast.

His voice was a husky whisper now.

"I feel such a devil that it scares me——"

"Hush, boy, hush!"

"All right, mother. I said you couldn't understand. I don't understand myself—but it's there——"

She held his head against her breast for some time, cradling it in her arms, dropping soft kisses on the smooth black hair, as when he had been a tiny lad,—then she began speaking softly, coaxingly.

"You see, dear—you're overwrought now. It will be much, much easier next time. And you needn't come often—perhaps once or twice a year. I'll always come with you. Now, for instance, in November, you need only stay two or three days. Perhaps——" (She had felt his chin jerk against her breast.) "Perhaps you might wait until Christmas. Then this bitter feeling against her will have lost its edge. I——"

"Oh, mother! mother!" he broke in with a groan. "Don't you know a feeling like that doesn't lose its edge? —It will get worse every time. Every time she will look at me with greater loathing. And I——"

He drew gently away from her, putting his hand to his head.

"I'm afraid I'll have to leave you now," he said. "My head feels so strange—I'll have to go and lie down."

"Yes, yes, darling," she urged him. "Go and get some good sleep. You will see it all differently tomorrow. Go and sleep, boy. You are worn out."

His face had a curious, withheld look as he stooped to kiss her. She had not understood, and he was glad that she had not, yet he felt an odd loneliness that he had never felt before when with her. "I'll try to see things as you do, mother. But it will be hard——"

"Go and sleep," she said, smiling, and holding his hand to her cheek for good night. "Go and sleep."

Richard went away next day on the morning train, but Dempsy stopped on a week longer. She left, expressing herself as quite "in love" with Virginia, and firmly convinced that she had mastered the accent. Owen took her on to join Sylvia Beresford and Lady Bemyss at the Hot Springs, and the day after they left Mr. Nelson and Aunt Charlotte returned to Nelson's Gift.

"We three lone women roam about this house 'like mice in a cathedral'—as I believe Sir Oliver Lodge says that electrons do in atoms," remarked Mary, as the last carriageful of guests drove off. She slipped her arm about Phoebe, who was standing on the lowest front step, where she had gone to give her father a last, good-bye kiss. 'Poor little grass-widow," she said. "You mustn't look so forlorn. What can we do, Sally, to cheer her up?"

"I'm rather a broken reed for cheerfulness, myself," said Sally drily. "I am going to the last resource—duty—for comfort, and shall write some letters that I've long neglected."

And she went off to her own room.

"What shall we do, Mouse?" said Mary, feeling a little vexed with Sally. She thought that Phoebe looked very pale, and she didn't like those purplish shadows under her eyes. She was beginning to think that Phoebe's persistent idea of Sally's dislike for her was not all imaginary. "Shall we walk, or ride, or have a game of tennis?"

"You're *so* sweet to me, Cousin Mary," said Phoebe in her old, girlish way, leaning her cheek against Mary's arm.

"But I feel so tired, somehow, today. If you don't mind, I think I'll just go and lie down in my own room for a little while."

And she too slipped off.

Mary stood looking after her, and determined to advise Owen, as soon as he returned, to ask Charles Patton to have a look at Phoebe. "The child's dreadfully run down," she thought. "She's such a sensitive thing, though—I wonder if Sally's attitude towards her has anything to do with it?—What a dreadfully complex thing 'family life' is. Even the 'holy family' had its frictions," she wound up whimsically, recalling how trying had been the brothers of Jesus of Nazareth.

Phoebe, lying listlessly on the lounge in her bedroom, with the little lace pillow pressed against her cheek, was gazing absently at the grey, flower-filled cornucopias on the old carpet, and wondering how often she would be called on to bear the horror of Richard's presence,—whether, indeed, she could bear it at all any more without going out of her mind. It seemed to her that her head had felt very queer and empty ever since he had come. All the joy lay on her heart like the withered leaves on the autumn paths outside. Only there was no gardener in her heart to sweep away these leaves. And she seemed to see her heart, a little feverish red ball wrapped in mouldering leaves. She turned over and brushed the hair from her face, holding it back with both hands and staring up now at the ceiling. One, two, three,—four flies. She thought all the flies died on some mysterious date in October. How had these come there? Probably the warmth of the wood fire had brought them to life again. She counted them over, then back again,—now straight across, now diagonally.

"How stupid my mind is," she thought. "It's so tired, yet it goes working over a silly thing like counting flies. Now, if I told him—if I got him to come here, in this room,—all alone,—the moment he comes back—and told him everything—how would that be?—It might be better than this feeling I have all the time now—all the time—even in dreams. Yes,—suppose he turned me out of the house—the poor baby and me—at least I would feel honest.—This horrible, slimy feeling of hypocrisy would be gone. But then——

"Well—you see," she said aloud, as if addressing some-

one. "I would so much rather be dead than be without his love."

The sound of her own voice speaking in the empty room gave her a scared feeling, and, strange to say, the feeling of the room's not being empty, but filled with some silent, inimical presence.

"It's as if we were never really alone." she thought, her heart beating faster. "As if there were—witnesses."

She turned over again, and again fell to staring at the grey cornucopias. What would he say if I told him? And suddenly her ears seemed ringing with vile epithets uttered in Owen's voice. She lay quite still, her heart beating faster and faster. She imagined him looking at her with a hard, jeering stare, cool as glass. She even imagined him striking her.

"Then what would I do?—I would get down close to his feet like a dog—and kiss them—and perhaps he would kick me. No, no!—I am going crazy—I'm not thinking my own thoughts—something—*not me*—is thinking them in me. It's that thing that's in this room—watching me—hating me——"

She spoke aloud again, before she knew it, sitting up and holding back her hair from her hot forehead with both hands.

"Well—you see," she said again, as though addressing that invisible thing. "The wages of sin is death. But suppose death doesn't come? What pays for sin then?"

Her voice did not startle her this time. "What pays for sin then?" she repeated, frowning and looking at the wall before her, as though she expected an answer. She waited a moment and then said, still aloud:

"If death doesn't come, one can go after it, and fetch it, and pay oneself—yes, that must be the way. Is it the way?"

She waited again as if for the answer. It seemed to come from somewhere, for she lay down again with a heavy sigh, murmuring:

"Yes—of course—that's it. But it's very diffieult to find death. It sounds easy in books—but really it's very —very difficult."

Here someone softly opened the door (she had forgotten to lock it) and Mary slipped in with a little tray on which were a glass of sherry and bitters and some delicate sandwiches.

Phoebe lay looking at her, still with the little pillow doubled against her cheek.

"I couldn't—I couldn't, Cousin Mary," she began murmuring, shivering with repulsion. But Mary came and knelt beside her, speaking with quiet determination. She knew the master-key to Phoebe's will.

"Listen, dear," she said, "do you want to meet Owen, when he comes back tomorrow, looking like a blue-and-white ghost? Do you want to be sent to some horrid place for your health, with domineering nurses bullying you from morning till night?—Very well, then,—take what I've brought at once. I've been watching you. Owen asked me to. You haven't eaten a morsel that *I've* seen for nearly two days. Come, Phoebe,—I assure you that Owen and Charles Patton between them will certainly pack you off to a sanatorium if they find you looking like this."

Phoebe swallowed all the wine and ate a sandwich and a half with perfect meekness. Then she suddenly rebelled and pushed the plate from her with petulant disgust. "Not another mouthful—not if they sent me to prison," she said, half-sobbing, half-laughing.

Mary put down the plate, and, sitting down on the sofa, drew her into her arms as though she had been a baby.

"There—there—there," she said, rocking her gently. "Do you know, Phoebe, I believe all this is more mental than physical. I believe you've got something preying on your mind. Yes—I believe I know your secret, you little ostrich—*Phoebe!*" she called the next instant. The girl hung limp in her arms. She had fainted dead away.

Dreadfully frightened, Mary laid her flat on the sofa, and rang for America on her way to the washstand for a wet towel.

Then, as she knelt by her, trying to restore her, she thought suddenly:

"I wonder—I wonder if it could be—*that.*"

But by "that" Mary only meant that she wondered if this time Phoebe might perhaps be going to bear Owen a son.

As soon as he saw her on his return from the Hot Springs next evening, Owen was struck by the sudden change in Phoebe, just as Mary had been the day before. It was as if some deep-seated inner illness had suddenly sent its painful signal into her pale face and heavy eyes.

But when Mary spoke of this to him, and asked if he did not mean to have Doctor Patton see her at once, he said no, that he thought Patton was not needed just now, and this confirmed Mary in her own secret thought of yesterday.

Owen, standing alone over his study fire, mused deeply and painfully. Some way must be found out of this *impasse*. He could not leave her to sit alone in the dark gaol of her thoughts, like the poor wretch in Poe's story on whom the walls closed inch by inch every day. Yet how? —how? In some way—by some means he must manage to impart more clearly to her his views on certain questions—on that question of bodily chastity in relation to the bigger things of life. In a general way she knew his opinions on that subject,—knew that he held no narrow, harsh views of women whom the world called "disgraced" or "lost"; but from the very closeness of the subject to her own piteous case he had never ventured to speak more than casually on such topics. Now the time had come when it would be a kind cruelty to wound her by direct allusions to instances of a like nature, and by so doing clearly and emphatically to make known to her his own attitude towards them. Yes, he must make her see once and for all that in his inmost thought it was by bad faith she had chiefly wronged him,—not by a fault committed before she loved him, but by her silence in regard to that fault—her lack of truth with him. He felt sure that, once he had expressed himself fully, clearly, strongly in the matter, she would speak out as he knew that she longed to, and her heart would be freed from the load which now seemed eating into it like a cancerous tumor that, long torpid, has suddenly under some hidden stimulus renewed its deadly florescence. She would see how, when he knew all, he could still love and honour her for all that was love-worthy and honourable in her, clean forgiving and forgetting the wrong that she had wiped out by confession. She must realise that he was one who left the dead past to bury its dead,—and that in his view the woman who has yielded unwisely to love has not by that one act shut herself out from all other love and the respect of those who obey a larger commandment than that written on the tables of the pharisaical: "Thou shalt not destroy physical chastity, even by ignorance, for by so doing thou destroyest forever all else that is worthy in thee."

Ah, how well he understood how it had all happened

with her,—poor child, so young, so undisciplined,—not half sensing where codes and conventions are weak and where strong; then slowly, as we all win our souls, coming little by little to the knowledge, from within as well as from without, that bad faith is at bottom *the* crime, the core of all crime. How well he divined the sense of cowardly hypocrisy that was gnawing her,—the remorse for the lie that she had acted to him; and the fear, the dark, dreadful fear that were she to tell him now he would turn from her with scorn and loathing.

No, surely, he must not lose more time. But how to come to this subject naturally,—without bluntness? He began running over such books as he might read aloud to her—"The Heart of Midlothian," "Adam Bede," "The Scarlet Letter," "Esther Waters." . . . No, none of these was what he wanted. All at once he remembered the volume of Brieux's plays that Sally had been reading that day when he carried the baby to her in the library. He straightened and a relieved look came into his dark face, which had been so puzzled and anxious. Yes,—he would read "Maternité" aloud to her that evening, alone in her bedroom; he would make her comfortable on the sofa, and then, sitting close to her, her little hand (which had been growing too thin of late) clasped in his and the lamp placed so that her face should be in shadow, he would read her the wonderful drama, and by his comments show her his inmost heart.

"If I can't ease that sweet heart of hers and bring her to confide in me wholly—I'm no man, but a straw image," he thought grimly.

XLIII

THE next day was clear and mild, though the blue haze had increased till the mountains looked like scenery in a dream.

"Let's go wandering, dear," said Owen to Phoebe, as they stood in the South Portico, after luncheon, watching the gardeners raking up the short grass from the lawns which had just been shaven. "You won't even need a hat—just put on boots and gaiters, so that we can go into thickets and 'brier patches' if we like—and then let's explore the whole farm."

"Oh, I'd *love* to!" said Phoebe, a timid joy stealing into her shadowed eyes. "It always makes me happy to go over the farm with you."

She ran off, and was back in ten minutes in a short skirt and stout little boots and shooting gaiters.

"We'll just stop in at the stables on our way out," said Owen. "I want to have a look at that foreleg of Paternoster's."

He took some apples from a basket on one of the hall tables, and they went across the western lawn towards the stables.

The mellow October sun flooded the world softly, clearly, like a great, golden sea whose bed was the arable soil tilled by little mortals. Against the vague blue hills and distances the autumn woods hung like an arras of lovely, faded tapestry, with now and then the more vivid accent of some frost-reddened tree spreading the great posy of its branches against the vaporous azure, just as those bits of ruddy seaweed were spread out by our grandmothers against sheets of bluish cardboard.

On every side man, tiller of the soil, was at his labours. Here the great fields of maize, their tassels some twelve and fifteen feet about the dark red earth, were beginning to go down beneath the grey blades of the corn-knives; there a spiked team,—two milk-white Clydesdales and a grey,—plodded soberly, slanting forward in the strain of ploughing—along the shoulder of a hill where wheat had been harvested in June. The rich, share-sleeked clods,—violet-brown in this fat "bottom"—fell, slowly turning, like a sluggish, heavy wave, in the wake of the plough. And that freshest, sweetest, most mysterious of all fragrances,—the scent of newly broken earth, floated dank and cool into the sunlit air.

High in the dreamy sky a buzzard,—ignoblest of birds,—noblest of aeronauts, sailed on moveless wings as though dozing in its assured, contemptuous flight above a world that creeps and clambers. And softly, rhythmically, like the beating of the day's heart under its blue gauzes—the regular "rap-rap, rap-rap" of the apple-packers' hammers sounded from the distant orchards.

As they stood on the flight of stone steps, sunk in the turf near the box-hedge that divided the western lawn from the paddocks, they could see the little Green-Flower, stained blue by the sky's caress, chuckling in its sleep as

it drowsed gently to the sea, bearing with it gay flotillas of red and yellow leaves.

Owen looked from the lovely scene to the little face beside him. It was very rapt and quiet. The big eyes seemed searching the hills for some answer to deep, deep questions. He put out his big hand and took the small one next him, and instantly the slight fingers curled tight about his (almost as little Di's had done that first day when he touched them), and his heart yearned to her quite as a mother's to her child in grief. But neither said anything. Silent and hand in hand they went on to the stables.

"Paternoster" was found standing calmly on the feverish member, which during the night had become as cool and firm as a well-conducted pastern should be, so they bestowed apples right and left, and passed on through the "old orchard," now fallen on senility, with its quaint, gnarled trees that bore "Leather-Jackets" and "Lady Apples" and "Bel-flowers," and under whose branches the horses were allowed to regale themselves on all the windfalls that they could manage.

"Shall we go and see them cutting maize?" asked Owen, and she said: "Yes. Let's do that. I love the smell of the cut stalks, and to see them building the shocks."

They stood for some time talking to the men and watching them at their work. Being in among the tall stalks was something like being in a jungle of bamboo, and the light air, stirring the broad leaves that were already turning brown, made a soft, incessant rustling like the sound of women passing on light feet in gowns of silk.

"I should think you might get lost in a cornfield—mightn't you?" asked Phoebe, gazing about her at the ranks of green and tawny canes growing so densely and regularly.

"You could indeed," he said, and he told her how an old slave had assured him that a cornfield was a surer hiding place than a forest.

"How good it smells!" said Phoebe. "And how fast they work!—They have almost built another shock since we've been standing here. I've always loved the cornshocks in autumn. They look like little wigwams standing about over the red fields. It makes me think of the days when there were Indians here—friendly Indians, weren't they?"

"Yes—fine, friendly tribes. Do you see that old silver-fir?"

He pointed to a splendid old tree whose top had been torn away, giving it a strangely Japanese look.

"That was where one of the first Owen Randolphs used to sit for 'pow-wows' with the chiefs—it's an old landmark. 'Logan's tree,' it's called.—That's Logan's tree, isn't it, Uncle Eben?" he asked, addressing an old negro.

"Yes, suh, Marse Owen, dat's sho' 'Logan's tree.' *My* great-gran'paw is ben tend on *yo'* great-gran'paw whilst he wuz confabulatin' wid ole Logan hisse'f onder dat ve'y tree."

"And now," said Phoebe as if to herself, "the tree is just the same—but they are changed. . . . They are dust now—but the tree is green and strong as ever."

"No sad thoughts, please," said Owen, drawing her hand through his arm.

"Indeed, indeed, I wasn't sad," she exclaimed eagerly. "I was only thinking how it all ends that way—everything—in quiet—in rest——"

"Well, do you consider that a very cheerful reflection?" he asked, smiling.

She still gazed earnestly and wistfully at the dark, tranquil tree, out of whose quiet branches a bird had just flown.

"Rest is such a beautiful thought," she said softly.

"Isn't joy as beautiful?"

She gave a little start and coloured slightly.

"Yes—it's all beautiful," she murmured.

They took a path across the fields towards the New Orchard, as Owen wanted to speak to Downer.

The brambles grew very thick near a bit of quagmire beyond which ran Logan's Creek, and he went ahead to hold back the long, thorn-armed sprays for her.

Looking at his tall figure in its old shooting breeches and light cotton shirt that disclosed the splendid muscles with every movement, Phoebe's heart swelled with love and pride and bitter pain. She thought:

"If he knew—if he knew—he would not trouble to hold back the briers for me."

An absurd idea intruded itself, as so often happens in our moments of keenest misery. She gave a little involuntary bitter laugh.—It was so unlike her usual laughter that Owen turned.

"What is it?" he asked. "Can't I share the fun?"

But the look in her eyes worried him, and all at once the thought of that day when he had overtaken her on her way to Thunder Mountain gripped his heart.

"This must stop," he thought. "I can't have her suffer like this. God knows what she might do."

"Well?" he said aloud, "what was your joke, dear?"

She looked half shy, half reckless.

"I was just thinking that if I were to be very wicked you wouldn't hold back the briers for me—you would 'teach' me with them, as Gideon taught the men of Succoth. Don't you remember?—Gideon went out and got him briers, and with them he taught the men of Succoth."

Owen laughed with her.

"I daresay all that Gideon taught them was a proper fear of Gideon. I don't believe one can teach much more than that with briers."

Phoebe walked behind him in silence for a few moments. Then she said in her low voice: "But you think wickedness ought to be punished, don't you?"

He answered over his shoulder, without looking at her: "There's so little wickedness—it's nearly all ignorance. In fact, it's *all* ignorance, in my philosophy."

The low voice came again after a moment or two: "But you would punish bad ignorance, wouldn't you?"

"I wouldn't 'punish' anything. I'd help it to see better if I could."

Silence again for a little. Then the voice grew lower than ever, almost inaudible:

"Don't you think King Arthur—in Tennyson's poem—was *too* good to—to Guinevere? Men aren't really ever like that, are they?"

He laughed out, walking steadily on in front of her along the narrow, bramble-set path.

"Too *good!*—I think he was a bally prig! The most sugary, conceited ass that ever wore a helmet!"

He heard a sharp little gasp behind him.

"I—I don't know exactly what you mean," she faltered.

Now he turned round.

"My dear girl," he said in a matter of fact voice, "just think the thing over for yourself. Have you read the 'Idyls' lately?—No? But you remember them clearly enough, I dare say. Well, then just do me the favour

of running over Arthur's noble behaviour in your mind. Firstly——" (He began marking off the points against the blameless king on his strong fingers, which she gazed at as though fascinated.) "Firstly—if he'd had a ray of 'gumption' he'd have seen for himself how things were with his wife and Launcelot. Secondly—when he did see (if he was so jolly noble and unselfish), he might have managed to arrange things so as to set them both free. Thirdly,—as it never occurred to him to do that,—he might at least have spared her that hifalutin' interview in the convent. Think of the picture of that sanctimonious prig, standing there in full armour,—while the poor woman grovelled at his feet,—and holding forth about her golden hair 'now lying in the dust,' and about how in heaven she would come to her senses and love him (why, pray?), 'not Launcelot nor another!' . . . You can't really admire that royal he-prude, Phoebe. You don't really think he was 'too good' to poor Guinevere, do you?"

Phoebe had stood through this, her colour changing from white to red, from red to white. It was so wildly, improbably strange to hear Owen thus defending the royal adulteress against her spotless husband.

"But—but——" she stammered finally, "but she was wicked, Owen.—She deceived him—she deceived her husband."

"Not in the vulgar, every day sense, Phoebe. She had been married by proxy to Launcelot when she was a young, ignorant girl. He was the most famous knight at Arthur's table. Night after night, during that long, false bridal journey, they lay side by side with his bare sword between them. But swords can't divide hearts and thoughts."

He took a step towards her in the narrow path, and, framing her face in his hands, raised it so that he could look into her eyes. "Tell me, Phoebe," he said softly, "do you think that a naked sword between us on our bridal bed would have kept our hearts apart?"

Her eyes quickened under his.

"No——" she whispered.

He held her to him an instant, then released her.

"And you may be very sure of this," he continued, resuming his walk ahead of her, "that, no matter what you had done, I shouldn't let you crawl about the floor

while I preached to you from the heights of my self-righteousness."

Phoebe walked behind him dumbly, her thoughts all in a bright, confused tangle like the parti-coloured ribbons that issue from a juggler's mouth. She was too bewildered to take real comfort from his words, yet there was a balm in them that soothed that steady, bitter pain in her heart. And presently, out of the bewildering, snarled brightness of these thoughts came one,—clear and golden,—a ray of hope piercing her darkness like a magic blade. He had found excuses for Guinevere! Maybe—maybe—— But no. It was impossible. He could judge Guinevere with leniency because she was so far apart from him,—but for his own wife,—the woman who slept on his heart,—who might some day bear his son—— He would not be human if he did not have for her another judgment. And then, besides, the child—the child that he thought his!—No, Guinevere had not been as false as she, Phoebe, had been. She had not gone to the king soiled and stained, letting him believe her pure,—letting him by marriage with her assume the fatherhood of a child not his. There it was—the unforgivable, the inexpiable,—the awful falseness on which she had reared her brittle palace of joy. What had she and joy to do with each other? She had snatched at the cloak of what she thought passing happiness, and it had come away in her selfish, feverish grasp, disclosing the stark figure of vain remorse barring her way.

Suddenly Owen sprang aside and pressed in among the twigs of a thicket near the creek which they had now reached. She followed him to the edge of the tangle, wondering what it was that he had seen.

When he came back, from between his big fingers, carefully hollowed, there peeped the sleek, tiny head of a field-sparrow, with its scared eyes so like blackberry seeds.

Owen opened his fingers slightly and showed her one little chafed claw.

"It was caught in a forked twig," he said. "If I hadn't happened to see it, it would have starved to death."

"Oh," said Phoebe, her eyes suddenly full of tears, "how kind, how *kind* you are to *everything!*"

Owen smiled at her over the bird's timid, bright-eyed head. "You talk of Guinevere's 'wickedness,'" said he.

"This poor little mite was 'wicked' enough to get itself caught in a forked twig. All young things who 'go wrong,' as they say, are just birds in forked twigs." He opened his hand, lifting it towards the sky with the little fluff of feathers quivering on it.—An instant's doubting pause,—then, like a shot from a magic sling, away . . . out . . . up sped the tiny life.

They entered the orchard by the southwest gate, and walked towards the sound of hammering along aisles of trees already stripped for the market. And these young trees, so vigorous and symmetrical, on which, only here and there, hung a small, reddish fruit too inferior to be worth gathering, seemed very sad to Phoebe. Patient dryads, they looked to her, from whom all their rosy offspring had been taken away.

"It was so gay and cheerful in here a week ago," she said, "and now the poor trees look so sad in their dark green dresses with all the apples gone."

Owen stopped and took a graceful bough in his hand. "Yes," he answered, "but think of the magic secret that each of these bare twigs knows. Thousands of blossoms hidden here,—thousands more of apples. . . . We shall be here next spring, please providence,—and you will see these sober things in bloom—each a tent worthy of Peribanou and her lover."

But in Phoebe's heart was the sick thought: "Can I stand it till the spring? This pain, all the time—all the time?"

"It must be wonderful," she said aloud. "I'd love to see them. But all these." She stooped and picked up an apple from the pile of discards near which they stood. "They look so fresh and sound. It seems such a waste to leave them."

"Look carefully," he said. "No matter how sound they seem, they have each their secret, too—a dark little secret this time."

"How?" she asked, turning the glossy, scarlet fruit in her hands and gazing at it.

He took the apple from her and showed her a tiny dark speck near the stem.

"It's only a speck," he said, "but it goes to the core. Wait—I'll show you."

He twisted the apple in two with a turn of his strong wrists. "There!—you see!" he said.

And Phoebe saw that the one black speck ran in a little groove to the heart of the fruit.

"Just one cheeky worm," he smiled, throwing away the halves, "and the whole fruit's good for nothing but pigs or bulk."

The blood rushed suddenly into her face.

"But all the rest was good!" she cried passionately. "Why do you throw it in the dirt?"

She stood gazing at the broken fruit, now smeared with red dust, and her dark eyes had a pained, almost angry, protest in them. He knew so well what she was thinking! He raged inwardly at his cruel, momentary forgetfulness.

"Of course the rest was good," he said lightly. "It's only that for the winter market they don't keep when they're like that. Apple merchants ask far more than philosophers. They won't be satisfied with anything short of perfection."

"It seems cruel somehow," she said sadly, all pale and listless again. "But of course they're right—it went to the heart.—If it had only been on the outside——"

He put his arm about her as they went on. "You mustn't talk so wofully, as if apples were human beings," he said, smiling. "Sometimes a worm at that strange thing, the human heart, only sweetens it. I can't imagine a more deadly companion than a flawless human being, dear woebegone."

"But just faults are different from a black spot in the heart——"

"Even that apple didn't have a black spot in its heart, Phoebe. Downer and I are far too proud to allow that to happen. That worm just took his selfish fill from one tiny corner. A black spot at the heart would come from some disease of the apple itself, and we don't have that kind at World's-End."

"But you threw it in the dirt."

"I did it without thinking."

"Yes—just naturally. It was blemished—men don't like blemished things."

"Your knowledge of men is of course beyond question," laughed Owen.

"I know that much," she said with dreary obstinacy.

"What you might call 'blemished' women have been loved more perhaps than any others."

"How could that be?"

"Because, as a rule, they have the most lovable natures and the warmest hearts. Despite your cock-sureness, I doubt if your knowledge of men is as profound as you think, little cynic. A real man—what a man would call a man—puts warm-heartedness and generosity and general charm far above other things."

"What other things?" she asked, her voice sinking.

He laughed softly.

"Why, conventional piety, and housekeeping, and strong-mindedness, and literary ability, and yes—and even bodily chastity. A real man had far rather take a generous, impulsive, warm-blooded, free-lance to wife than an immaculate but mean-natured virgin."

Phoebe could not feel the soft earth of the orchard under her feet for a few paces. She tried to speak, and swallowed nervously.

Then she said, her heart racing:

"You mean if—if—he knew it and chose to do it.—But —suppose——"

That nervous swallowing seized her again. She managed to finish her sentence.

"Suppose—he found it out—afterward?"

Owen gave that soft laugh again.

"From your awe-stricken tone," he said, "I suppose that you fancy him slaying her, or crying 'Avaunt, wanton!' in a terrible voice, and turning on his superior heel to leave her forever to remorse."

Phoebe walked on blindly for another moment, clinging to his arm, through which he had drawn her hand.

Then she faltered.

"Well—what would he do?"

"If he were a real man," said Owen, striking with his stick at the drooping boughs, "I should think he'd be so devilish sorry for her,—that he'd probably love her all the more to make up to her for all she'd suffered."

"Oh!—It's turning black!" cried Phoebe, and she fell against him, grasping with her other hand.

He sat down on the warm, dry earth, and laid her with her head upon his knees. When he saw that she had recovered, and was not going to faint, he said:

"You know, Phoebe—Mary's been telling tales on you. It seems that you don't eat enough to maintain a mosquito. Now, while I've got you so entirely at my mercy, you've got to promise me something. Either you promise

that from this time forward you'll eat properly, or I 'phone for Charles Patton as soon as we get back to the house."

"Oh, I promse—I do promise," she said. He pulled her up into his arms, holding her jealously.

"You little imp!" he said brokenly, "to dare go fretting over things you won't tell me of—you wicked child!—Don't you know me yet?"

A wild impulse leaped in Phoebe. It was almost like the leap of a quickening child within her.

"I'll tell him now," she thought. "Yes—now! No!—I can't—I can't! He thinks he'd forgive—but he doesn't know really—he can't know——"

And, in a passion of pain and love and remorse, she clung to him and returned his caresses with wild ardour.

Owen thought:

"Almost—almost she was going to tell me then——"

When he helped her to her feet there was a soft colour in her face and her eyes were like blue stars.

They came at last upon the still joyous scene of the apple-packing. Here the trees were still laden with gleaming fruit, and the gatherers in their blue overalls hurried to and fro with the white, split baskets heaped with scarlet balls.

The head-man told them that Downer had just gone to the mill-stables, so they turned in that direction. Some young mules, with gentle, foolish faces and eyes blacked round the edges like a professional beauty's, came crowding about them as they crossed the pasture.

"What lovely little feet they've got!" said Phoebe happily. "I wonder if they like apples!" Her heart felt so light that these young mules with their plushy, bitumen-black coats and long black and tan faces seemed to her the most exchanting creatures. All the animals under George Downer's care were as tame as household pets, and the mule colts, all fuzzy and sleek at the same time, nuzzled and pressed about her for the apples with which she had filled the pockets of her coat.

As they reached the mill some piglings were being fed in a little trough outside the general feeding-pen, and again it seemed to her that she had never realised what adorable creatures were the young of swine.

She caught Owen's arm and laughed with glee over their greedy antics until tears hung on her thick, short

lashes. One piggy, the "runt," unable to reach the mush in the trough as easily as the others, balanced on his fat stomach with his tiny hams and hind feet hanging like tassels in the air. And they snuffled, and guzzled, and choked, and bit at one another, squealing until they were all splashed with buttermilk, which clung whitely to their long eyelashes and eagerly flapping ears.

"I *must* see the mother of these darlings!" she said, and Downer introduced her to the preposterous "Desdemona," whose lord, "Othello," enjoyed the dignity of a mansion, with glass windows and a paddock, all to himself. She leaned over the fence, and scratched the back of the Berkshire matron with a stick that Downer handed her, and the huge sow, pleasedly moving her thick hide, looked up at her out of her strangely human eyes, set with inch-long lashes.

"Owen! Come and see! She looks at me as if she understood things! I thought pigs had ugly little eyes. I never looked at one so close before. Her eyes are a lovely brown,—and the whites show on both sides like people's eyes. And what eyelashes! Owen! It makes me feel queer the way she looks at me."

They went together to the paddock of the thoroughbred stallion, "Coxcomb." Owen whistled, and he came slanting towards them in a splendid curve, tail floating out like a slim plume of brown thistle-down.

"Why, he's gentle as a dog!" she cried, caressing the ruby-lined nostrils, soft as bats' wings. "I believe he'd let me kiss him."

And she touched her lips to the delicate muzzle. "Coxcomb" sneezed in acknowledgment of this compliment, and covered her with speckles of white.

Then Downer led the way to where the giant Clydesdale, —"Clyde's King," moved at a majestic, clumpering walk along the fence of his kingdom. His huge neck, clothed in its wavy, parted mane, was thrust towards them like an Albrecht Dürer drawing of a mediæval war-steed. The great, dark globes of his eyes looked mildly inquiring, and he seemed to smile ingratiatingly, wrinkling up his square lip from his big, stained teeth.

"He's asking for an apple," said Owen, and she offered him one, drawing back her hand rather quickly as the rubbery lips "happed" down on her palm, securing the apple.

Then the Standard-bred "Emperor" and the "Jack," "Blue Thunder" were visited, and Downer called up the Southdowns for them, and pointed out the young cattle grazing in the mountain pasture.

"It's nice being so *near* them all," Phoebe said as they turned away. "I've got such a new happy feeling, as if I'd just realised that I'm a little animal too, and that it's good to be an animal——"

"Dear little animal!" said Owen, laughing.

He was so rejoiced to see that he had been able to lift the pressure of pain from her heart that the full, simple life throbbing all about them seemed peculiarly magnetic and akin to him also.

"And this evening,—when I've read that play to her," he thought, "she'll realise still more how I feel, and that she needn't scorch her dear heart night and day because of me—and—yes, perhaps she will tell me—and together we will put the past away—forever."

XLIV

OWEN sat by the sofa in Phoebe's bedroom, with her hand in his, reading Brieux's great play to her as he had planned that afternoon.

The night was so mild that, though there was a fire on the hearth, both windows stood open, with the shutters thrown back, and, from where she lay, Phoebe could see the pricking of the stars through the moths'-down dark, and hear the dry seething of the yellow poplar leaves in the soft wild wind that came passionately sighing and fainting out of the west.

From a shrub just under her window rose the sweet, feeble trilling of some belated insect, bidding the summer farewell, and there was a springlike piping of frogs from a far meadow.

She lay quite still, her eyes on the windy darkness and the little gold blur of the Pleiades, seen now and then as the leaves were blown apart.

At the end of the second act he laid the book face down on his knee and said:

"Isn't that a marvellous, heart-breaking thing?—I won't read you the last act. It's fine in its way, but somehow

one feels that it's there to prove things—written for a purpose outside the tragic humanness of the rest. Brieux is making some big points in it, but the great throb of the drama has stopped."

"How does it end?" she asked in her most muted voice. "Does she die?"

"Yes—poor little soul."

"Does . . . does she kill herself?"

"No. She dies from malpractice. I suppose her sister tried to save her from having a child."

The wind spent itself for the time being in a great breath like a love-sigh, and in the stillness that followed the fluting of the lonely cricket rose faint and pathetic.

"I am glad she died," said Phoebe, and her voice too was pathetic and very faint.

"But what a horrible, useless thing it all was," he answered. "One real man with a heart in his body could have saved them all. That's where the tragedy comes home to me, darling."

"Could have saved them?"

He played with his mother's ring on her hand. "Why, of course, darling. If that brute of a brother-in-law had been half a man even, don't you see how he could have sheltered and comforted that poor child and his wife? It makes one's blood boil, because, though Brieux has put it into this masterpiece, it happens all the time in real life."

"*You* would have saved her."

She did not put this as a question, but stated it as a fact.

"Yes . . . you would have saved her. But you couldn't have saved her from herself."

"How do you mean, dear. . . . 'Couldn't have saved her from herself'?"

"From the pain and the shame and the long, long misery," said the muted voice.

He lifted the hand, which had grown so cold in his as he read on, and kissed it and the ring.

"I hope that I'd have had the power to save her even from that," he said.

"But how could you? How could anyone?"

He laid the little hand on his knee, and stroked and played with it as though it were a flower.

"Do you know, Phoebe," he said, "I've a notion that you've got rather a Pietist way of looking at such ques-

tions. I've noticed it several times. And I don't like to think that there's even one vital point that we don't perfectly agree on."

He heard her take in her breath softly, cautiously. "How don't we agree?" she said.

"Why, you spoke as if that poor girl in the play would have had to go on being ashamed and wretched, no matter what happened. You said it just as if it were a matter of course. Or did you mean that?"

"Yes . . . I meant it."

"But darling . . . forgive me,—but that's such poppycock!" he said.

"Oh, Owen!"

"Such out-of-date, Puritanical twaddle, my sweet dear. Do you mean to say that that poor child" (he caught his own breath imperceptibly before going on), "just because in her young, ignorant love,—thinking no evil,—she became the prey of a scoundrel,—do you really mean that you would have her suffer and be ashamed all the rest of her life?"

"No, no . . . I wouldn't want her to. She . . . she just couldn't help it."

"If *I* had been her brother she could have helped it. I would have made her see things as they are, not as prudes and prigs and puritans say they are."

"Yes . . . but. . . . "

"But what?"

"A . . . a . . . *brother* . . . might. No, even a brother couldn't! Oh, don't you see? . . . "

She raised herself on one arm now, pushing back her heavy hair.

"Don't you see? . . . it . . . it . . . wouldn't be what others thought. . . . It would be her own thoughts . . . her thoughts about herself."

"And what do you think these thoughts would be?"

The answer came quick and passionate.

"She would hate herself . . . she would feel that all the seas couldn't wash her clean."

Owen pushed aside the little table that held the lamp, and, coming close, drew her head upon his breast.

"Darling, you exaggerate dreadfully," he said. "In the first place, true chastity is really a thing of the spirit. The body may make a mistake and the spirit may chafe and be wretched,—but it's absurd and unreasonable

to consider that a girl who has erred through love is a polluted being. She's an unfortunate being as the world wags now,—but she's far and away a higher being than the woman who marries for convenience or money. She's stars above the woman who for prudential reasons gives herself to the embraces of a husband that she dislikes or despises."

He could feel the violent beating of her heart through the arm over which his hand was clasped. "She . . . you're talking of a girl in a book," came the low murmur.

"I'm talking of every girl who ever has lived, or does live or will live," he said, kissing her hair.

She lay quite silent. Then she said:

"You wouldn't talk so . . . if . . . if it was . . . me."

"And why not, you ungrammatical darling? You don't know me quite. Suppose you were suddenly to tell me that you had had a lover . . . (he held his breath again) . . . a child even. . . . Do you think that would change my love?—Don't you think, knowing you as I do . . . the woman who has slept on my heart now for half a year . . . don't you think I know you well enough to know that such a thing could not have befallen you except through love?—And don't you know that to fall through love is not to commit a crime, but,—as the world goes now, —to make a bitter mistake? Don't you know that motherhood in itself is a sacred thing?—Can you really think for a moment,—knowing me as only a woman knows the man who is her mate,—can you think I would judge you? Condemn you?"

Suddenly she wrenched herself free and slipped to her knees before him, grasping his arms with both hands. She hung there from his shoulders like the figure in the old print clinging to a stone cross in a stormy sea. Her eyes blazed on his, her lips were parted.

"Oh, I will tell you! . . . I will tell you!" she cried, her bosom struggling against his knees for breath. "I will . . . tell you . . . " she panted on a lower note. And now she hung heavily from her clutching hands and her breath came quick. "I will . . . tell . . . you. . . . "

"What, my darling? What will you tell me?" he said, his arms about her.

And he thought:

"Now . . . now she is going to tell me . . . at last!

And I will stop her after the first words,—and tell her that I've always known . . . and that she need never see Richard's scoundrel face again. . . . Now . . . now. . . . ''

To her he said again:

''What is it you want to tell me, my dear darling?''

But her eyes, still gazing at him, changed;—the fire died down in them. She turned piteously pale, and slowly, thickly she faltered:

'' . . . That I love you . . . that I love you more than God.''

Then her head drooped forward against him. He felt her shaking with great sobs.

''I . . . I . . . am just sorry . . . for the poor girl . . . in the play . . .'' she whispered through that piteous sobbing.

October passed on its swaggering, golden way. November came and went, with its pale crown of Indian summer and veil of wood-smoke from forest-fires, through which peered a sun coloured like a Jacqueminot rose.

December rushed on World's-End, frost-nipped and cheery, with the ''weather-glim'' of icy-gold and violet belted about its round horizon, and the sound of axes ringing from the mountain woods.

And this long chaplet of wonderful, vivid days, (never had there been such an autumn and early winter said the old folk)—this jewelled rosary of time, Phoebe told with the feverish fervour of a nun, whose convent may be sacked by nightfall,—telling her heaven-ensuring beads. For it had been understood early in November that Richard could not come again to World's-End until Christmas, and then only for a few days. He was simply overwhelmed with work, Sally had explained. Sylvia Beresford wanted him to decorate the whole lower floor of her town house, and Mrs. Pierce-Hull had commissioned him to paint ceilings and walls in the big hall of her country place on Long Island.

So Phoebe lived, as was her ardent wont, with might and main during the precious respite that fate had accorded her.

She was that wonderful thing to Owen, mistress and wife and companion all in one, and he felt sometimes as though he must break through the thin veil that still hung

between them, and tell her to be utterly at peace,—that not even for a few sinister days need she ever see Richard again;—that he (Owen) knew, and understood, and took her part against herself so that not even in thought must she be disloyal to her truest self,—the self that was her own and his,—that should be inviolate of anything so low and disintegrating as vain remorse.

But he controlled this desire. From the beginning he had kept silence for two reasons:—first, that Phoebe might not think compassion alone had prompted him to offer her marriage; second,—(and this was by far the most vital factor in his course towards her)—that she might develop from within, of her own volition, into the fineness and strength of character that he knew to be latent in her.

If he forced the truth and his forgiveness upon her, they would still be gifts from without, things apart from her. But if the truth so wrought in her that she could no longer act a lie, then she would indeed possess her own soul. She would *be* truth, not wear it at another's bidding like a garment that may be put on and off at will.

Perhaps life, master of irony, never arranged a situation more to his gusto than the arrival of Richard at World's-End on Christmas Eve. Laden with gifts he came, and of course everyone (even Phoebe, to whom Owen had made a present of the present that she was to bestow) had gifts for him, neatly laid away in tissue-paper, sealed with little red cross charity stamps, and tied with ribbon decorated with holly. No,—it is impossible that irony ever had more toothsome nourishment than when Richard was handed by Mary, as distributor of Christmas-tree fruit, a volume of Villon in a marvellous old binding, the gift of Phoebe to her nephew-in-law; while Phoebe received a real "yellow-jacket" of royal Chinese weave, with buttons of solid gold,—the season's offering from Richard.

She got America to light a huge fire in the laundry later in the day, and slipping out (the laundry was a brick building to itself) she locked the door, and laid the lovely robe on its last bed of coals. It writhed feebly before it caught, as though sentient, and she watched it shuddering, her hands gripped together, and her heart beating fast. Very slowly it burned, and some of the gold buttons were melted, and some escaped among the

ashes; these last America fished out afterwards, and had set in a gorgeous bracelet which she never wore, however, until safely out of sight of her mistress.

Then, still pursuant of this great ironic play, custom must needs compel Richard to follow with the little company that, headed by Phoebe and Owen, went first to Downer's house to preside over the "Christmas-tree" held there yearly for the laborers and their families. Then down to the servants' dining-hall at World's-End, where a like tree was erected for the negroes and pickaninnies, and a noble feast, including roast pigs and turkeys, spread for the retainers and their friends. He had to stand by, smiling as best he could, while the old servants drank the healths of the family one by one, name by name,—and called heaven's blessings on the "l'il mist'ss" meaning Diana) and hoped that Owen's seed would be like Abraham's—"as dee sands of dee sea." And at Hannah's request, he had to play the small organ that was Owen's Christmas gift to them (being the only musically endowed member of the family there was no escape)—fitting horrible, commonplace chords to

> "Dere's a star in de East on Chris'mus morn,
> Rise up, chillun, an' follow."

And to the old plantation hymn, oddly out of place to the Caucasian mind at such a festival:

> "God's gwine set de worl' on fire!
> He's gwine raise de heavens higher!" etc.

And also Richard had to play, "Nearer my God to thee," while the rich, thundering chorus of throaty negro voices rolled about him, and he could see (without looking at it) Phoebe's face, hard and cold and white as a heart-shaped pearl, close to Owen's shoulder.

When Sally would have drawn him into her bedroom for a good-night talk that evening he shrank back, saying in a stifled voice.

"Not tonight, mother . . . I'm not fit to be with anyone but myself tonight."

And he went off to his own room and, shutting the door with a vicious jerk, was suddenly aware that his eyes were wet with tears of rage. Yes, it was as he had said to his mother that autumn, the edge of his helpless, base anger

against her whom he had injured only grew keener with time and occasion. Hateful desires wrung him. He imagined himself wiping that little frozen curl of implacable, sick scorn from her red lips with a kiss of hate; —searing it from them with the cold flame of angry lust. And he shook, standing there alone in his room, as with the evil appetite of some gnawing disease which craves unholy food,—with a low hunger akin to the horrid greed of the cannibal for human flesh. For he was struggling in the throes of that cruelly dividing emotion,—desire for a woman's beauty, and hatred of the woman herself.

And ever there grew in him the craving to hurt her,— to wound her in her dearest nerve. He had not descended so low into the abysm of self that he desired to ruin her in the eyes of others; what he craved was some stinging moment, he and she alone, when he could fling her back again some measure of the scorn with which whenever they chanced his way her still eyes covered him. What right had she to look at him as though he were offal, as he had once said?—After all, she had not been a child when love overcame her. Something at least of the ways of passion she must have guessed. She had come out to him in the soft May night. Did she expect to pass a wild night of spring with a lover and go scatheless?— Had not her lips clung to his? Her breast throbbed quick on his?—And he grew dizzy with the longing that memory awoke in him, and the fierce anger which he now felt against her for daring to treat him as though he were some refuse that life had left upon her path.

To hurt her . . . to hurt her in her dearest nerve, secretly, cunningly,—that only would assuage this cold fever that devoured him. But he knew well that madness lay that way. He must endure as best he might. Yet here she and her child were lapped in luxury—and he constrained to this vile hypocrisy unless he would be beggared of everything.

He stood at his window, staring out at the lovely lawns and fields wrapped in winter moonlight, and a shrilling shimmer of sound told him that the sheep were running after the bellwether from some imaginary danger. The sound brought back all childhood and boyhood. He remembered how once when a tiny lad, he had asked his mammy, sitting up in his crib to listen,—"What's that funny noise?" And mammy had said: "Go to sleep

little master, dat's only dee sheep-bells. H'it's only your own sheeps running to fold."

And when he had asked—"Are they really all my sheep, mammy?"

She had said: "Well, dey's as *good* ez yo' own sheeps—same as dis whole place is good as yo'n—ef Marse Owen don't never marry."

And now it had all slipped from him forever like some bright, teasing houri in a dream. And she and her child,—his own child—would have it all. . . . Yes . . . she had taken everything from him . . . stripped him naked . . . yet she must needs blister his bareness with her steady, unrelenting scorn. . . .

Then, suddenly, with that curious perverseness which was his chief characteristic, he realised that the emotion which so rankled in him was one of rare and peculiar savour. Cesare Borgia might have felt towards a woman who dared scorn him just such a poignantly envenomed mixture of desire and hatred.

And he began to muse on the power of different cycles over the form assumed by human passions, which at core are so unvarying.

He recalled the portrait of Cesare, by Raphael, in the Borghese gallery at Rome, and how several people had said that he resembled it. His face was longer and more sharply modelled, but he could see, himself, that his opaque, black eyes, slightly swimming up from the lower lids, and his mouth, small, composed and secretive, were much the same as those in the portrait. Yet, though this biting, poisonous emotion that now corroded him might have been felt by that other, pang for pang, his expression of it in the fifteenth century and any expression that could be given it in the twentieth must necessarily differ in all essentials.

It brought him a grim diversion in his sore, exasperated mood, unmedicined by even the hope of retaliation, to fancy what course Cesare might have pursued with a woman who presumed to look at him with a very nausea of loathing. He remembered how the Duke of Valentino had been used in perverse sport to shoot with arrows at prisoners loosed in a court-yard for the purpose,—pinning them by the hair and garments with cruel skill, until he chose at last to send a shaft home in the quivering flesh. Yes, he might have ordered a woman like Phœbe

to be brought into that court-yard and, then, cool, inscrutable, with the little placid smile on his small mouth, he might have sent his delicate arrows through her gown as she ran terrified from wall to wall,—fixing her at last by the mass of her splendid hair. Then, while she hung there, crucified against the wall by her own hair, he might have advanced, smiling and suavely elegant in his velvet and slashed sleeves, and, as he sealed her terrified, parted lips together with a kiss,—might have driven his poniard into her heart.

Yes,— it would have been like Cesare to take that subtle, terrible caress from dying lips that loathed him. There were no such men or passions now. Even he, who could conceive this blighting force of lustful revenge in another, had no desire to harm vitally the woman that he craved and detested at the same time. To make her share, if for a moment only, the stinging humiliation which she dealt out to him was the utmost of his desire. But he wondered whether,—had he lived in Cesare's day, —he might not have been capable of deeper cruelty.

As the week which he was compelled by circumstance to spend at World's-End went by,—his pent, sullen anger against her bit ever sharper and sharper. Small incidents were continually happening to exacerbate this feeling. The skill with which she avoided ever addressing him directly without seeming rude was really amazing. Never once, since his first visit in October, had she spoken to him, except in the casual way demanded by her position as hostess. When she did speak, she looked between his eyes. Once chance so arranged it that they met face to face in the woods of World's-End Mountain. He had gone out with his gun, though the legal date for shooting was past, having sickened of hunting, and the long, aimless rides that formed the only alternative. Phoebe, seeing that "Borak" was not in the stables (she was very careful to inform herself of Richard's probable whereabouts), and ignorant of the fact that a groom had ridden him to Crewe, had gone to the winter woods for refuge.

They met face to face. Richard, standing by a great boulder in the dry bed of a stream, saw her coming long before she saw him. His first thought was to turn back, then a savage impulse fixed him. He stood watching her, his small mouth just touched by a smile.

Phoebe was walking with her head bent, her eyes on

the dead leaves which rustled ankle-deep about her. Growing warm with the steady climb she had thrown her jacket over one shoulder, and rolled her gloves into a ball, which she tossed absently in her hand as she advanced. When she was about a yard from him she looked up with a start, like one rousing suddenly from sleep.

Her face went white and her eyes black. The gloves fell on the dead leaves between them.

Richard stooped and handed them to her. She took them mechanically, then turning short, went away from him between the grey stems of the trees. When she had gone about ten paces he saw her hand open and the gloves fall at her side. She walked rapidly on and soon the grey aisles hid her from him.

A blaze of wrath scorched Richard.

"She dropped them as if they were filth, just because I'd touched them," he thought, staring at them. His jaw set with an ugly clench. As he passed the gloves on his way down the mountain he kicked them aside among the underbrush.

That afternoon, when tea was being served in the rose room, Mary ran in with the baby, and sat her on the carpet.

"Just watch her!" she cried, laughing. "She'll be toddling before we know it. She pulls herself up on her little feet by anything that's handy."

Richard saw Phoebe's eyes dilate as they fixed themselves on little Diana. As once before, the baby was crawling straight towards him, pausing now and then to hammer with her little feet on the carpet, and gurgle joyously. In her eagerness she had taken her small underlip entirely under her daisy-petal teeth, and her small chapped chin glistened like a pink shell with the tension.

Phoebe half rose from her chair, then sank back again. She was just pouring out a cup of tea for Sally. With a hand that shook slightly she carefully dropped in the two lumps that Sally always took with her afternoon tea.

Richard, with a cruel joy at his heart, watched the baby's rapid advance towards him. This was her chiefest treasure. He would grasp it in both hands and she could not cast it from her afterwards as she had cast her gloves because his touch had soiled them.

"Isn't she *too* darling with Richard!" Mary cried, delighted. "See her lifting herself up by his leg!—Don't

be frightened Richard—she won't hurt you," she ended, laughing.

"I'm not at all frightened," said Richard.

The baby, with both dimpled arms clamped about his leg, was slowly but surely, amid a series of earnest little grunts, dragging herself onto her bronze-shod feet.

"Pitty! Pitty!" she shouted, sueeeeding at last and having resource to her latest accomplishment in words to express the triumph of her soul. And bobbing and dipping slightly in her effort to maintain the perpendicular, she gazed up into Richard's face, her arms wrapped about his leg.

He bent forward and, gripping her by either arm, lifted her suddenly upon his knees. Still gripping the small arms fast he held her there, staring at her with what he meant to be a smile, but which was more like a grimace of pain. And he gripped her tighter and tighter, a savage desire to hurt overmastering him.

"Bravo, Richard!" called Mary. "He's really scared to death . . . " she smiled in an aside to Owen, near whom she was sitting.

But now the baby, who almost never cried, was getting the oddest look on her little face,—half like one who courts a coy sneeze, half that of a woman who is afraid of cats and senses one in the room. Her delicate eyebrows made a sudden "V" on her forehead,—her under-lip thrust out like a wee cherry,—then suddenly, the finest, most piteous wail came plainting up from her little breast.

Phoebe swooped like a hawk. Her eyes were the panther's that sees its cub maltreated. She caught the baby to her heart, and stood glaring at Richard, trembling from head to foot.

"You hurt her!" she spat at him. "You hurt her! . . . How dare you!"

"She's a little coward," said he coolly. "Fancy my hurting her. . . . "

"You are the coward,—to hurt a baby!" cried Phoebe, beside herself."

Sally's voice slid in like a sliver of ice between flames.

"Owen, I must really ask you to speak to Phoebe,—she seems quite out of her head. . . . "

Richard rose and strolled to a window. He did not wish his face to be seen just then.

Owen, putting his arm about Phoebe and the baby,

who was now catching her breath in a series of little half-comforted, hiccoughy sobs, led them from the room.

"He hurt her!—Coward! . . . He hurt her!" Phoebe kept saying, shaking so violently that he was afraid she might let the child fall. "He hurt her! He hurt my baby!—I could kill him!—I could kill him!"

It was a long time before Owen could quiet her.

XLV

THREE days before New Year the weather turned bitter cold; the roads became like iron and the little Green-Flower was stiffened from bank to bank in a mail of grey ice.

"If this continues for a few days longer we shall have skating," Owen had said at dinner that night.

On the second morning, however, the thermometer suddenly dropped, thick, yellowish clouds heaped themselves along the horizon, and as twilight gathered a feathery snow began to fall.

All night it snowed, and dawn broke over a white world.

On that morning, although it was the middle of the holidays, Owen had an engagement in Charlottesville with his attorney. There were some last matters to go over before his new will could be put into its final form, and he was very anxious that Sally should have a copy of it at the earliest date possible. He was anxious, also, to have the matter settled once for all and dismissed entirely from his mind. He had decided, during this last visit of Richard's to World's-End, that some way must shortly be found to prevent the recurrence of so dreadful an ordeal for Phoebe. Perhaps, in the softened mood that would result from Sally's knowledge of the inheritance with which he had provided Richard, he might be able to suggest to her, that, on account of the evident antipathy which existed between him and Phoebe, it would be better that he should not come to World's-End in the future while they were stopping there. He thought that he could make her see the reasonableness of such a proposition, merely by referring to the painful scene which had taken place only two days ago in the rose room, when Phoebe had thought that Richard purposely hurt little Diana. Owen

himself, while all one ache of sympathy for Phoebe, had not for a moment shared her opinion in the matter, although he did not let her see this. As ruthless as he considered Richard to be by reason of his quintessential egoism, he refused to believe that he could be moved by so stark and primitive a force as that of reflex cruelty directed against the child. No, her wild suspicion was only the result of that inner pain and repulsion which Richard's mere presence excited in her, working feverishly on nerves already strained to snapping point. But in one way or another she must be shielded from such suffering, and the sooner the copy of his will was in Sally's hands the sooner he would be free to make some move in that direction.

Phoebe drove with him to Crewe, wrapped in the white fox furs which had been his Christmas gift to her, and which Sally had told Mary were absurdly inappropriate for anything but evening wear.

"What difference does it make here in the country?" Mary had replied. "She looks such a darling in them—like a lovely little Mrs. Santa Claus,—and she won't wear them in town except to the play or a dinner."

Sally said contemptuously: "He decks her out as if she were a doll."

And Mary demurely retorted, thinking of Phoebe's pounce on Richard in the rose room: "She's rather a lively sort of doll, I must say."

"A little like the Iron-Maiden of Nuremburg," Sally capped it.

Mary said to herself: "Phoebe is really right. Sally detests her."

Returning from the drive to Crewe, Phoebe made David stop at the stone bridge and got out. In spite of her fur-coat she was chilled by sitting motionless for all those miles, and she turned off along the river to lengthen the walk. She would go around by the boat-house and so up through the rose-garden,—quite half a mile more than if she had followed the avenue from the bridge.

As she passed the boat-house, and turned into the narrow path between box-hedges that led through the garden, past the maze called "Queen Charlotte's,"—she saw Richard coming towards her.

Her first impulse was to turn back, then, as every form of cowardice was hateful to her high-spirited nature, she

went quietly on, that white, still look which the sight of him always brought freezing her face, under the soft snow of her cap.

When he was directly opposite she pressed herself among the stiff box-leaves for him to pass, but he stood still, looking steadily at her.

From this point the columns of the west wing were hidden by the huge mass of box that walled the garden from the lawns; only the chimney stacks were visible and part of the railing of the roof and south portico. They were as alone in the winter garden as though the walls of pale blue air had been marble.

When she had waited for some two moments, Phoebe said in her lowest voice:

"Let me pass, please."

Her eyes looked levelly past him, and he could see that she was holding her inner-lip between her teeth.

In a smooth, monotonous tone he replied:

"Do you think it wise on your part to show your feeling for me so very openly?"

It had not seemed as if her face could grow whiter, yet it did so.

"Please let me pass," she said again.

"Pardon me . . . I confess that concern for myself mixes with my motive, yet concern for you moves me too."

She stood perfectly silent, but one nostril trembled slightly. It was the quivering of the muscle which marks contempt in a human face.

"You may sneer," he said with sudden violence. "But I suppose that you have some sort of regard for my uncle."

She put up her hands and jerked open the fur at her throat with a startlingly quick, mechanical gesture. He saw her swallow, once,—twice.

"Don't dare to speak of him," she said, still in that very low voice, scarcely moving her lips.

His narrow eyebrows lifted like his mother's—those opaque black eyes of his swam a little more towards the upper lids.

"Really . . . " he said in a dry tone. "I am not to be allowed to mention my own relative?"

She repeated in exactly the same voice and cadence. "Don't dare to speak of him."

Richard gave his short laugh.

"Come," he said, "this is going a little too far. He was my uncle, you know, before he was your . . . husband."

Nothing could exceed the insolence with which he uttered this last sentence.

"Don't dare to speak of him. . . . Don't dare to speak of him," she said again, exactly like one talking in sleep.

He looked at her with a condensed look, curiously hateful.

"And why?" he said. "You did not always count me so unworthy."

He felt as though he had stabbed a snow-image.

She stood just as still, just as frozen, her eyes even did not quiver. They looked past him blank and fixed.

He went on:

"There are several things, in fact, that I must say to you, and they include my Uncle Owen. . . . "

At this name she leaped to life as though he had kindled resin. Her eyes blazed full on his, her breast heaved. She clenched her hands, pressing them against it.

"If I were a man I'd kill you," she said.

Richard smiled. This was a more womanly mood. He quite understood it. He felt more at ease.

"Yes . . . I daresay," he retorted. "But as you're not a man, don't you think we'd better be practical?—It doesn't matter when we're alone as now,—but when we're with others, don't you think you'd better restrain the outward signs of your . . . a . . . dislike for me?—Your present happiness has a frail foundation at best. If you continue to treat me as you've done . . . lately. . . . " (He smiled again.) "My uncle can hardly help having his suspicions aroused and then. . . . "

He shrugged one shoulder slightly, still smiling.

"Oh, coward! . . . Pitiful coward!" said Phoebe, almost in a whisper, and her voice was like the moan of one only half chloroformed. "If he had not gone away you wouldn't dare. . . . "

"You give me," said Richard, "no credit whatever for a possible consideration for yourself. I had thought that in his absence an interview with me would be less painful for you. After all, he has been a good uncle to me . . . I am trying to save him possible suffering. Yes,—in my way, I am trying to serve him. . . . "

She was panting now as though she had been running

far and fast through the heavy snow; her eyes had that wild, glazed look of a hare caught suddenly in fangs that only half kill.

"'To serve him'!" she stammered. *"You!——"* She caught desperately at her broken speech,—rushed on. "You aren't worthy to eat the dust his feet have trodden. . . . His dog is nearer to him. . . . If he knew you he would spit upon you. . . . "

Richard was as white as she was now, but he still smiled.

"And yet," he said, "you were my mistress before you were his wife."

It was these words uttered with clear deliberation that Owen heard as he came swiftly up over the soundless carpet of snow. He had in his hand the ash stick that he usually carried, and, as these words came from Richard's lips, he struck him with it across the face. It laid his cheek open from chin to temple, and the blood gushed forth startling as a red flower in that winter garden.

And at the sight of that blood, and the stricken face of her he so loved, Owen went suddenly "berserk."

Thrusting out his great hand he caught Richard by the collar of his coat and jerking him from the ground beat him as a vigorous wench beats a carpet.

When she saw that limp, bloody figure writhing without a sound in the terrible grip that was a madman's, Phoebe screamed, the scream of a snared hare,—and sprang to them.

"Owen! Owen . . . Stop! . . . O God! O God!"

And she clung to his arm, reaching wildly towards the hand that held the ash,—sobbing . . . seeing nothing in her terror but rivers of dreadful scarlet . . . a crimson world. . . .

. . . Suddenly Owen's arm fell,—his grip on Richard loosened, and like a doll of rags the beaten man subsided in the snow at their feet.

Owen stood like a figure of stone staring down at him, the ash still clenched in his hand, but Phoebe dropped on her knees beside the huddled, blood-smeared form, and began wildly searching for signs of life in it.

"Oh, God! . . . Oh, God!" she kept sobbing. "I can't feel his heart. . . . You've killed him . . . Oh, God! . . . Oh. God!"

All at once Owen roused. He threw the stick from him, and stooping lifted Richard in his arms. He went

straight towards the house, and Phoebe followed, her hair fallen loose about her head like a poor street-girl's after a drunken brawl—her white furs blotched with blood. More than ever she looked like some wild, soft wood-creature mangled by fangs that only half kill.

But when he came to one of the old marble vases that stood at the head of the first terrace he stopped and eased his burden upon it. Despite his enormous strength the dead weight of a man nearly six feet tall was too much for him; the sweat poured from his face in the cold air, as it had done when he carried Phoebe herself from Hollybrook Wood to Nelson's Gift. Besides he had suddenly begun to think with astonishing clearness.

She stood beside him straight and stiff,—the attitude of a soldier awaiting orders. She who fainted so easily over her own troubles felt firm as iron to help him bear his. He was staring out at the snowy ground with bent brows. Suddenly he turned his eyes on her. His look was hard and impersonal,—the look of an officer appraising the force of a lieutenant to whom he is about to give nerve-testing orders.

"Can you help me?—You don't feel faint?" he said.

"No, I can do anything. Tell me."

"Then go and send Jonathan and David—find Mary and tell her to keep Sally out of the way—send Hannah to his room. Wait . . ." he said sharply, as she sprang forward. "Take off your coat." She did so. "Fold it inside out." She obeyed him deftly. "Tell Mary, . . . tell anyone who asks, that Ironmonger savaged him." (Ironmonger was a colt that had only been handled a few times, and was feared to be vicious. Downer and Owen had put him a loose-box at the house stables, hoping to "gentle" him by constant kindness and handling.) "Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"He went into the box, and the colt got him jammed and kicked him. Tell Mary to break it to Sally. Now . . . quick!"

She was off like a lapwing, her hair beating loose upon her shoulders as she ran, and hanging at last in a great, unravelled knot below her waist.

The swinging of that bright rope seemed to fascinate his eyes:—they remained fixed on it until she was out of sight. Then he looked down at the head hanging like

a broken manikin's over his arm. The blood had coagulated and frozen about the long split in the cheek; the eyes showed in silvery streaks and a half-moon of dim black under the purplish eyelids; the open mouth, at one corner of which the blood had clotted, made a small grim hole in the ghastly face.

At first he had not struck to kill, else Richard would have dropped like a bullock,—but afterwards. . . . The old human threat "I'll break every bone in your body," came back to him. Yes,—he had meant to beat that body to a pulp,—he had not cared while that ecstasy of rage held him whether he took one or twenty lives. Was Richard dead?—Was it a corpse that he was holding against the great vase, as against a funeral urn?—And would Sally, too, fall dead with the shock of it?—In that moment he felt curiously indifferent. Glutted rage resembles at first the plethora that follows the glut of animal food. He had sent Phoebe on those precautionary errands from a motive that had nothing to do with emotion or the instinct of self-preservation. It was civilisation reclaiming him. He,—who so lately had been mere savage, clubbing what had maddened him with the single fury of a cave-man battering his enemy with a stone,—had waked with cool wits to the necessity of preventing scandal, of protecting others, of shielding Sally from unnecessary shock and Phoebe from the sinister results of his outbreak. Personally, whether Richard were alive or dead mattered nothing to him at that moment. He, who shrank from wounding a bird, felt a cold, aloof indifference to the shattered thing that lay there, half in his arms, half on the marble vase.

And then he saw that Phoebe was returning, still at a fleet, light-footed run over the noiseless snow, followed by old Jonathan and David, also running, but out of respect keeping a little behind her.

Owen took Richard's body under the arm-pits, and the two others supported his back and legs. They walked slowly to the house, breaking step so as not to jar him more than was inevitable.

And Phoebe, in her thin blouse and skirt, her hair still loose about her, walked close to Owen, talking in low quick tones.

"I found Mary. . . . She's with Cousin Sally now . . . Hannah is getting everything ready . . . I told them what

you said I was to tell them. . . . What must I do now?"

" 'Phone Patton—He's at Warwick.—He has a motor today.—He brought me here.—Tell him life or death."

She was off again, elbows to sides, chin up, like a boy running.

They got Richard to his room, Owen helped Hannah to cut away his clothes and lay him in the bed. They had scarcely finished when the door was thrust open and Sally entered with Mary close behind her. Her black eyes were fixed like a somnambule's. She went straight to the bed and fell on her knees beside it. One arm curved above the stark head on the pillow, the other she stretched out along the limbs outlined by the counterpane. These arms in their sleeves of black velvet were like the wings of some great bird striving to hover a shattered nestling.

Mary stood quiet and still behind her, her fingers plaited together, great tears running down her face. The servants were huddled in a dark silent knot near the door. Owen stood at the head of the bed, his face like stone. They all thought Richard dead.

"Bring me cloths and hot water," said Sally's voice.

Mary knelt down beside her, and put her arm about her shoulder.

"Hadn't we better wait, dear?" she whispered. "Doctor Patton will be here in a little while. We might do harm. . . . "

"Very well," said the impassive, slightly croaking voice. "I shouldn't like to do him harm."

Mary hid her face in her free hand, and the tears ran through her fingers.

The door opened and Phoebe came in.

"Doctor Patton is on his way now," she said in a clear, quiet voice. "What else can I do?"

"Nothing," Owen answered her. "Go to your room and try to rest."

"I can't rest," she said. She looked from one to the other.

No one returned her look, they were all gazing at that dreadfully quiet bed. She stood there a moment longer, then stepped quickly backward and went out.

She went straight down the wide stairs, across the hall, and out again into the snow. As she neared the garden hedge she broke into a run. Faster and faster she ran, until she came to the place in the narrow path near Queen

Charlotte's Maze, where they had been standing when Owen came on them. Dropping on her knees she began scooping the snow with both hands over the red stains that marred it here and there. This accomplished, she looked about her with that look of a trapped, desperate hare. On every side her dark, scared eyes quested. Then she began making little rushes to right and left. At last, beyond the box-hedge, in a furrow between the rose beds she saw what she was seeking.

Pressing through the stiff twigs she went swift and light-footed as a mousing cat and picked up the big ash stick. As she grasped it a shuddering fit seized her for the first time, her teeth chattered and the blood rushed over her white face. Then mastering herself,—kneeling down in the fresh snow, so as to be less easily seen by anyone chancing to cross the garden,—she examined the stick inch by inch.

Yes . . . there . . . some dark stains. Involuntarily her hands opened, the stick fell again upon the snow. Again mastering herself she seized it and began scrubbing at those red smears with a handful of snow. They seemed grained into the wood: she could not remove them, though the white dust fell pinkened through her fingers.

After some moments of this vain labour she hid the stick under the dark cloak that she had snatched up in the hall, and went rapidly back again to the house.

She stopped to listen. Except for the ticking of the big clock in the upper hall the house was still as death. She shuddered again, then skimmed swift and noiseless to her bedroom. She shut and locked the door. As usual a great fire of logs burned on the wide hearth. Kneeling before it she thrust the end of the stick in the coals. It ignited slowly, the ferrule becoming incandescent and the wood burning to a glow like coal. As it burned she thrust it farther and farther in. Now all was consumed but the big knob, polished by the grasp of generations of Randolphs. She thrust this, too, in the lambent mass under the bellies of the huge logs,—struck it home with the poker of wrought steel,—raked the glowing embers over it.

Then only did she sink back upon the hearth-rug with a long, long, heavy sigh.

The fire had scorched her eyes, her eyelids seemed to have no moisture in them. Her loosened hair, hanging in snarls about her cheeks, troubled her suddenly.

Springing to her feet she went to the dressing table and began to comb and brush out the tangled lengths. Her own eyes looked back at her serious, almost angry, but they held no meaning to her. Her mirrored face was like the face in a picture which has no meaning save to the artist who painted it.

It was like a mask—and she felt masked to herself. She had lost her feeling of identity. She was someone moving through a play the whole of which she had never read; —her own part and the "cues" were all that she knew of it. Now it was her part to make herself neat and go and sit in the upper hall in case she might be needed. Presently she knew that the curtain of the first act would fall. Her part would be over. She was only cast for that first act. What was Owen's part?—She could not tell. But the play would go on without her presently, and he would still be in the play. Her part was a very short one. It must be over after Doctor Patton came. When Owen had heard what he had to say, then he would spare the time to come and tell her that she must go. It was strange,—long ago—in a far country,—she had wondered what he would do if he ever found out,—whether he would kill them both. Now he had killed Richard.

She was very wicked—worse than she had believed herself to be, for, think and urge herself as she might, she could not be sorry that Richard was dead. She was only sick with fear for what might happen to Owen. But she could lie for him at least. It was good to be so wicked if that would save the one you loved more than God.—She could swear that Richard struck him first. No one else had seen. Yes, she could lie for him. Swearing on the Court Bible to that firm lie, she could give her soul for him; even he, in his just wrath, could not keep from her that dark privilege.

As she pinned up the last coil of her hair the chugging of a motor sounded just under the window. She looked out, holding the embroidered curtain before her face. Yes, that was Doctor Patton. He got out with a black case in his hand and came quickly up the steps, looking neither to right nor left. Once, though, he lifted his head and stared up at the blank face of the quiet house. Then he disappeared.

Phoebe slipped noiselessly into the hall, and sat on a little chair just behind the first archway where she could

see part of the lower hall and the door of Richard's room without being seen herself.

She saw old Jonathan make as if to show Patton the way, but the doctor merely nodded and brushed past him, mounting the stairs lightly and rapidly, still with that fixed stern look on his face. He went straight to Richard's door, opened it without knocking and went in, closing it behind him. In another moment Mary, Sally and Hannah came out.

Sally still moved and looked like a somnambule. Her mouth was like a thin, violet bruise on her sallow face.

Mary walked with her arm about her, murmuring something all the time very low into her ear. Sally took no notice of her or of anything. Behind them came Hannah, crying softly, and making no attempt to wipe her eyes or cheeks.

Hannah turned off towards the servants' stairway, and the other two went on into Sally's room. Phoebe saw Mary's hand steal out behind her, drawing to the heavy mahogany door.

She was all alone now in the great hall, with only the slow, imperturbable beating of the old clock for company.

"I am the true heart of the house," it seemed to say. "No matter what human hearts are stilled beneath this roof I beat on unwearying from generation to generation."

She gazed up at it as at a human face.

"It will go on beating,—beating long after my heart has stopped," she thought. "When all our hearts have stopped forever,—it will go on beating, night and day."

But now a little regular, muffled noise on the stairway made her look up startled. It was Wizzy, coming up with stolid, infirm perseverance, one step at a time, in search of his master. Phoebe slipped to the stairs and met him. She lifted him up in her arms, and pressed down his sleek, resisting head against her breast.

"Be good, dear,—be good," she urged lowly. "Owen's in trouble. You can't see him now. Stay with me. Owen's in trouble."

The dog gazed up at her out of the senile tears in his aged eyes, and, though the words were inscrutable to him, the tone he understood quite well. He stopped resisting, and lay limp and forlorn within her arms.

So passed a long, long time. Hannah came and went

with various things. Joe followed, bringing cans of hot water from the bathroom. A strange, hospital odor of disinfectants began to steal through the hall.

Sally came out of her room again, still with Mary's arm about her and stood listening. Niobe must have looked like that as she stood listening for the deadly twang of the god's bow-string.

Mary,—still holding her by the arm—as though she feared to have her out of touch for even an instant,—reached out and dragged a hall chair nearer. But Sally merely moved a step away from it, without impatience, with a sort of fatal determination, as of one resolved to die standing.

Then Owen and Patton came from behind that door, which somehow seemed the door of fate,—and the four went again into Sally's bedroom.

Wizzy whined and struggled when he saw Owen, but Phoebe put her hand quickly over his little working snout, and whispered vehemently to him to be still, and again, as if by a sort of telepathic understanding, he subsided and ceased to whine.

And now again they were coming out. This time Sally walked between Charles Patton and Mary, each of whom supported her. Phoebe could see the muscles in her thin throat working convulsively, dragging down the corners of her mouth in a grimace of anguish. She was fighting with all her harsh, imperious will for self-control. Owen followed, still with that face of stone, and this time they went again into Richard's room.

Another long, long time,—then Owen and Doctor Patton came once more into the hall, leaving the door slightly ajar. They walked towards the staircase. No sound came from that darkened room.

Just as they were about to descend the stairs Phoebe stole forth, with Wizzy still in her arms, and went up to them.

She fixed her big, strained eyes on Patton's face.

"Is he. . . . Is he . . . ?" she whispered.

"He's very ill, my dear," said Patton. "Concussion of the brain. But I can't stop now. I've some things to talk over with Owen. Go and lie down. I'll come to you presently. Tell her that she must lie down, Owen."

Owen said in an expressionless voice:

"Go and lie down, please, Phoebe."

"I will," she whispered, and went quickly away from them, her head bent over the little dog, who was again beginning to whimper and resist.

Owen closed his study door, and turned to Patton.

"I needn't tell you that it wasn't a horse's hoofs did that work."

"No . . . I saw that," said Patton quickly.

Owen looked at him.

"I did it," he said.

Patton returned his look unmoved.

"Yes? . . . Doubtless he deserved it," he replied as quickly as before.

"At first," continued Owen, "I didn't strike to kill, but afterwards I meant to, I think. At least, I didn't care whether I killed him or not. No——" he added in a firm voice. "I meant to kill him. Will he die?"

"Sit down, old man," said Charles Patton.

Owen obeyed mechanically.

Patton went on speaking in a quiet, professional voice.

"I can't tell anything until he comes out of this stupor," he said, also taking a chair. "It may be very serious . . . it may only be a matter of careful nursing. By the way, did you have Miss Carney and Miss Lee 'phoned for? The case will need a night and day nurse."

"Yes," said Owen. "I sent Jonathan to attend to it at once. They will motor down this afternoon."

"Good. That compound fracture of the right arm is going to be troublesome. I don't think there are internal injuries, but it's all a matter of guess-work for the next twenty-four hours or so——"

Owen got up rather slowly, and went to the window.

After five or six minutes Patton rose and followed him.

"Don't 'eat your heart,' old man," he said

Owen made no reply. After a while, without turning round, he said:

"If he dies I shall consider myself legally answerable."

Patton scowled to himself, thrusting out his heavy under lip, and staring at Owen's broad shoulders which half filled the window.

"Quixotism is a rum thing," he remarked finally. "It deals chiefly with the tender conscience of the quixotist and is apt to leave out other people."

"I can't sneak out of a just debt of manslaughter, Charles," said the other dryly.

Patton said:

"Do you mind if I light a pipe?"

"No. The matches and tobacco are in the usual place."

Patton lighted his faithful briar, and then, after several considering puffs, said slowly:

"You know there are ways and ways of bearing a thing without having recourse to 'sneaking out of it.'—In my opinion the man who bears the burden of a fault. . . . "

"'Manslaughter' is not a fault,—it's a crime."

"Well, say of a crime then,—the man who bears such a burden in private,—when no good whatever can be done by accepting public ignominy,—who bears it alone,—rather than cover his family with the reflex disgrace of his punishment,—well, in my opinion, that man is a better citizen,—more a man in fact,—than the purist who gives himself up to man-made justice for the assuaging of his own conscience."

"Charles, that is sophistry, and you know it"

"I beg your pardon. I know it's hard sense."

"He was defenceless and I struck him. I had a stick in my hand that would have broken an ox. I held him up and smashed him like an eggshell—my brutal strength against his weakness. If he dies I am answerable to the law,—and,—I shall answer."

"There are things in law called 'extenuating circumstances.' "

"Yes. They will do me no good."

Patton thrust back a half-burned log with his foot as though he hated it. He went on, though he knew that he might as well beat with a feather against a wall of iron. What dark, evil mystery lay behind this appalling disaster he could not even vaguely surmise, but that it was very dark and very evil he felt assured. The circumstances that had caused Owen Randolph to break another man in pieces, not only the law but the gods themselves might well deem "extenuating."

"Look here, Owen," he said in a voice of sweet reasonableness, "as man to man,—as brother to brother I may say,—tell me this:—do you honestly consider that to rot out the better years of your life in a penitentiary would really avail anything with gods or men?—Do you honestly believe, that,—in case—well . . . in case of Richard's dying,—that it would soothe Sally,—even if she knew the facts, which mercifully she does not, you tell

me;—that it would assuage or comfort her in the least to know that her only brother was a convict——?" (He pressed it home.) "And your young wife,—your child. What of them? And the old name. . . . Your father's name?"

Owen turned a dreadful face on him.

"Forgive me . . . " he said thickly. "I find I can't discuss it."

He went quickly to the door and was gone.

Patton's teeth nearly met in the mouth-piece of his pipe. He started towards the door, then stood stock-still, scowling at it from under his shaggy brows. His face worked. He put his hand over it, and stood a long time in the darkening room without moving.

Then he strode forward, jerking open the door as if he were wroth with it, just as he had kicked back the fallen log, and went up to Phoebe's bedroom.

She was lying on the sofa, the little lace pillow pressed to her cheek, gazing at the grey cornucopias of the carpet. Wizzy lay in the curve of her waist, and as Patton opened the door looked up, eagerly working his black nose, dry with age, in search of the beloved aroma he so yearned for.

Phoebe sat up as Patton came towards her, and gazed at him with those strained, dilated eyes that he had noticed just now in the hall.

He went over to a carafe of crystal that stood on a table near the bed and, pouring out a glass of water, brought it to her with two little white pellets which he handed her, all in silence.

She swallowed them with the sweet obedience which made her so touching in her times of trouble.

"Now," he said cheerily, "lie still a little longer. I'm going to sit here by you and pamper Wizzy till those little chaps get their work in."

After five minutes had passed, and still he sat there silent, she said timidly:

"Doctor Charlie——?"

"Bless me," he said, smiling, and putting out his hand. "I was hoping you had dozed off."

"Oh, no!" she said. "I couldn't sleep. I don't feel as if I should ever, ever sleep again."

"You don't, eh? . . . We'll see about that later on. What were you going to ask me?"

"About. . . . About . . . Owen . . . Where is he?"

"I think he went for a walk," said Patton, with kind mendacity.

She sank back with a little resigned sigh that struck him as piteous.

Presently she said:

"Doctor Charlie . . . has he told you?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Did he tell you that I. . . . "

"He told me about nothing but his own part in the matter," said Patton quickly.

"Ah . . . " said Phoebe. Her face began to quiver. She turned her head against the little pillow to hide it.

The door opened.

Phoebe started violently. The desperate jerk of her whole body as it lay prone on the sofa made Patton think of a just caught fish jerking for breath on a bank.

"Hello!" he said cheerily, rising. "Here's Owen now."

He took out two more little pellets and twisted them in a leaf torn from his prescription book.

"Just take those in another hour," he said. "I must be having a look at my patient. See that she takes them, Owen."

"Very well," said Owen in his level, lifeless voice.

Patton went out.

Owen locked the door, and, when Phoebe heard that sound, a fierce wave of mingled terror and joy broke over her.

"Now . . . . Now . . . " she thought, "he's going to kill me too!"

She lay with her eyes shut, waiting,—and she seemed to be swaying back and forth through space in a great swing.

Then she felt his cheek against hers on the little pillow, and one of his arms went over her.

"My heart,—my little heart. . . . What have I done to you?" he was whispering.

Phoebe had a sensation as though she had fallen from an immense height upon a cushion of air that kept her from being crushed.

"My sweet. . . . My winsome . . . what have I brought on you? . . . What have I brought on you?" the hoarse, anguished whispering went on. And now his face was

buried on her breast, his arms held her to him as though they would drag her back from some awful abyss.

Light struck her like a blow.

"*He didn't believe him . . .* " whirled the wild revelation—"*He didn't believe what Richard said. . . .* "

XLVI

ONLY at a place "run" as Owen ran World's-End could the story of "Ironmonger's" savaging Richard have been plausible for a moment, but during the Christmas holidays the servants there were always given an unusual amount of freedom, and on that day every groom had been absent from the stables since nine o'clock in the morning. David, after driving his master to Crewe, was to stable the bays, feed them, and then also take to himself a leisurely afternoon.

It was because he was aware of all these facts that Owen had thought of fixing the disaster upon "Ironmonger." He knew that David's devotion could be trusted, and when he left Patton in the study he sent Jonathan to tell David to meet him at the foot of the western lawn.

The white man and the black man stood facing each other in the winter twilight.

"David," said Owen, "I am going to give you a proof of the entire trust that I have in you."

"Yessuh," said the taciturn negro.

"I have said that Mr. Richard's accident was caused by the colt,—that he went into 'Ironmonger's' box and the horse savaged him. Do you understand?"

"Yessuh."

"No one must ever guess that this is not the truth. I have grave reasons for wishing it."

The negro's soft, heavy eyes gazed at him unflinchingly. There was in them a look much like that in Wizzy's melancholy gaze when he regarded his master.

"Yessuh, Mr. Owen, suh. You kin count on me."

"I know that David. Thank you."

"Yessuh. Thank *you,* suh."

" 'Ironmonger,' must leave the place tomorrow. Mr. Downer's nephew, Mat Goodeloe, is anxious to have him. Take him there. Say the horse is my New Year's gift,—

that I consider his present viciousness only due to his not having been handled from a foal as we handle our colts here at World's-End. He is by Ironsides out of a Coxcomb mare. I bought him from a man named Ladd in the other valley. If Goodeloe wishes to sell him he is at perfect liberty to do so."

"Yessuh."

"You've got that straight, David?"

"Yessuh."

He repeated Owen's instructions and stood waiting.

"Take him off by daybreak tomorrow. I am keeping the motor that Doctor Patton came in at World's-End for the present. When you come back from Goodeloe's take the cobs and the light wagon and go to Warwick for gasoline. I will let you know later how much to get. Where has the motor been put?"

"In dee second ca'yage house, suh."

"Very good. That is all, David."

The cause of Owen's unexpected return to World's-End within twenty minutes of his arrival at Crewe had been the collapse of a railway embankment near Charlottesville. Despite the calm assertions of science and philosophy there seems to be a force at work in the lives of men called variously fate, nemesis, karma, destiny.

It seemed to Phoebe that the following week was passed in another state of being; that she was in a lower realm of that so-called "astral world" so glibly described in some of the books which she had perused during the last year. Everything looked strange, phantasmal, curiously unfriendly. She saw sinister faces in the winter branches, the shadows on the snow, the furniture and hangings. The folds of her own garments thrown on chairs or bed formed themselves into death's-heads. The pictures in her fire were goblin-like. When she took up a book to try to divert her anxious, harrowed mind, it seemed always as though a mocking chance led her to phrases and descriptions that had a horrid likeness to her own case or the ghastly events that had just befallen.

And the two trained nurses, in their bleak, white linen gowns and caps, stealing everywhere through the silent house like preoccupied ghosts, added painfully to her illusion. They seemed to her like true astralites,—clad differently, moving differently, speaking in different tones from the denizens of the familiar, everyday world.

Miss Lee was a small, slight woman of about forty, with kindly, composed grey eyes, and a tender, comforting little way of saying "The *best* doctors are alarmists, dear Mrs. Randolph. Don't be scared by Doctor Patton's gloomy face." Miss Lee was the day nurse, and before she went to her room she would sometimes slip in with a word of good cheer to Phoebe, telling her how much better the patient seemed, or that she did not really think that his right arm would be stiff for life as the doctor feared, or that he had certainly looked at his mother with recognition once at least, that morning.

But Miss Carney, the night nurse, a tall, vigorous young Amazon of twenty-eight, was used to awake from her nine hours of energetic slumber like a young giantess refreshed to exaltation with the wine of sleep, and, after a strenuous walk and a hearty dinner, she would tap at Phoebe's door before going on duty and insist on massaging her, or brushing that "just too perfectly beautiful hair."

Phoebe disliked intensely being kneaded from head to foot by strange, strong hands that made her feel as though she were but a little, helpless heap of sentient dough,—yet could not bring herself to refuse these generous offers for fear of hurting the kindly feelings of Miss Carney. And as she kneaded, and rolled, and rubbed,—kneeling on a cushion beside the ivory-coloured bed on which poor Phoebe lay stretched like a second Iphigenia on the altar at Aulis,—the ebullient nurse would pour over her a cataract of pathologically lurid anecdotes gathered during her professional experience.

Some of these cheerily related tales were so ghastly that for hours after Miss Carney withdrew to her nightly watch,—Phoebe would lie there, tingling with over-excited muscles and nerves,—afraid even to try to go to sleep lest some of the horrors so vividly described should haunt her dreams.

She went rarely to the nursery in those days and when she did it was merely to kiss the baby swiftly and go out again.

Giles had a very severe air towards her. She considered that no event less upheaving than that of the last day should interfere with all due attention to her nursling. So one morning she appeared firmly in Phoebe's room with Diana, and placed her without a word in her mother's arms.

Phoebe held her a moment, kissed the top of the little hay-scented head, and then rising put her back in Giles's arms.

"I . . . I can't . . . Giles," she said. "I'm too miserable. I can't play with the baby while I feel like this."

"If you'll pardon me, m'm," Giles had said with grim firmness, "your child should be a consolation to you, m'm."

"Yes, yes . . . I know," Phoebe had said irritably, "but I can't have her now, Giles. I really can't."

With in-folded lips Giles had marched to the door. Reaching it she turned.

"If this blessed lamb falls ill, m'm," she said dourly over the baby's head, "*then* you'll know *real* misery!"

And with this parting shot she went out, closing the door so softly that it was a more scathing exit than a bang would have been.

If Phoebe rested badly during these feverish days and nights Owen could not have been said to rest at all. He slept on a couch in Richard's dressing-room to be within call at any moment, for it took both Patton and himself to assist in moving Richard without giving him too much anguish.

The chauffeur plied constantly on errands of all sorts, in addition to taking Patton, during such hours as he could be spared, to the houses of his more seriously ill patients.

America ventured once to tease the grim Giles about her solitary meals, shared in the little "office" off the pantry with this red-bearded personage, but Giles's rebuff had been so scarifying that even America had not attempted a second onslaught. "Ye black folk are aye thinking of mating and muling," said she. "Just to think of the ruck of ye is to fancy ye in a great cuddling-bed such as they used to have in Wales, so my grandmother told me—and being Welsh she should know. Ye'll e'en keep your black nastiness from the name of Martha Giles or I'll have a word with the master."

America had retired furious, but subdued.

Phoebe saw very little of Owen. After the momentary break-down, when he had come into her room locking the door, on the day of the misfortune, he had turned again into a man of stone. Phoebe kept to her room most of

the time, but now and then Patton would burst in tempestuously and drive her out for a walk. He also bullied her into taking a tonic. But nothing succeeded in rousing her from her pale listlessness.

Sally she never saw, except sometimes on her way to and from Richard's room. Mary was nearly every moment with Sally. Phoebe's only real companion and approach to comfort in those days was "Wizzy," and the little dog followed her everywhere like a small decrepit shade, and slept close to her at night, wrapped in his little blanket, where he could nudge her with his hot, dry nose when evil dreams harassed him. In some dim, doggish way he certainly felt that being near Phoebe was the next thing to being near his master.

On the tenth of these dreadful, unreal days,—near six o'clock in the morning,—Phoebe had just sunk into a troubled doze, when a wild, unhuman scream roused her. She sat up trembling all over, and "Wizzy" started up too, his scruff bristling. If it had not been for the dog's action she would have lain down again, thinking she had dreamed,—so deathly was the stillness of the house after that one awful cry. But as it was she lighted her candle as soon as her shaking fingers could find the matches, and throwing on a dressing gown went out into the hall.

A low wind was making a harp of the outer door. The old clock beat immovably on. These were the only sounds. But then she saw a band of yellow light under Sally's door. As she gazed at it Miss Carney came running out.

Phoebe rushed to her.

"Can't stop now . . . " she said, running on down the stairs. Phoebe was after like a deer. She gasped as she ran:

"You *must* tell me. . . . Is he . . . dead?"

Miss Carney was passionately breaking ice from the big lump in the refrigerator.

"No . . . get me a bowl please. No . . . it's his mother. . . . Doctor told her . . . out of danger . . . went off like that . . . sorry can't stop," and thus, telegraphically speaking, Miss Carney seized the bowl without ceremony, clapped the ice into it and was off upstairs again in a fleet run.

Phoebe followed slowly. Her knees felt as though made of wet blotting paper now. She helped herself up each step by the banisters.

Reaching the upper hall she went and sat in the little chair behind the archway as she had done on that first day. But now her eyes were fastened on the door of Sally's room. Was she going to die? Was she perhaps dead already? Oh, what would Owen do if *this* came on him? Nothing that she could do, no, not the pouring out of her very life, could help him if this horror were to befall him. And icy cold, her feet and hands numb, she crouched there, wrapping herself with both arms,—straining them about her own body as though she would help it to bear this new and fearful pain.

Wizzy, holding up one paw as though it were wounded, came and gazed at her, shivering so violently that she felt compelled to loosen her desperate hold on herself and take him in her arms. So they sat, the wretched girl and the little wretched dog, trembling together like one flesh.

What seemed to her long hours afterward, Mary came out in her soft, white dressing-gown. Her face was very pale but quiet, and hope stirred in Phoebe's heart. Holding Wizzy to her she stumbled forward.

"Mary . . . " she called in a hoarse whisper. "Mary. . . . "

Mary turned with a start and came towards her. She took her and Wizzy in her kind arms.

"You poor, dear little soul," she said. "You look half frozen. It's all right, darling. Don't shake so. Doctor Patton has pulled Sally through. It was the shock of joy after her long despair. Come back to your room, poor baby. We shall have *you* ill next thing."

She drew Phoebe into her bedroom and made her get into bed.

"My poor, poor baby!" she said, cuddling her. "I'm afraid you've been dreadfully neglected all these sad days. Your little patties are like ice. Are your feet cold?"

She slipped her hand under the bed-clothes and felt the marble-cold feet.

"Just you wait a minute!" she said, nodding and smiling.

She went quickly out and came back in a few minutes with a bottle of hot water in a crocheted overcoat. It seemed to Phoebe that she had never felt a more blissful sensation than the contact of that bottle's warm little stomach with her frozen feet. Tears came to her eyes.

"Cousin Mary, you're an *angel!*" she cried, choking and

dragging Mary's head convulsively down to her with both arms.

"Now . . . now . . . " murmured Mary. "Don't you be imitating poor Sally . . . there . . . there. . . . "

She patted and soothed her as if she had really been a tearful baby.

"I'll tell you what I'm going to do!" she cried suddenly, straightening and putting her fingers wisely to her lip. The little dance had come back to her light eyes. "We're both rather cold and forlorn—I'm going to get my spirit-lamp and make us both a cup of nice, hot tea!"

"Oh, Cousin Mary . . . *dear* Cousin Mary," murmured Phoebe, between tears and laughter. "It's like when you read of good things to eat in a book and get *so* hungry. It seems to me I'd rather have a cup of tea right now than go to heaven!"

"But first, Madam Greedy," replied Mary, "we're going to have a nice blaze in this vault-like apartment of yours. Where does Ameriea keep her kindling?"

Phoebe told her and half got from bed in her eagerness to help, but Mary pushed her back unceremoniously and "battened her down," so to speak, with the bedclothes tucked deep about her ears. Phoebe submitted smiling, but still tearful with mingled relief and gratitude, and then Mary brought a parcel of little "fat-wood" splinters (the resin soaked portions of old pine) and, kneeling down before the chimney, soon had a sheet of spark-shot blaze roaring up it.

"Oh, what a *good* husband you ought to get, Cousin Mary," sighed Phoebe from the bed. "Aunt Patty says that when a woman can kindle a good fire it's the sign she's going to have a good husband."

Mary laughed.

"He'll have to be one of the 'sons of God' to equal *that* fire!" she said, with gay pride in her feat.

The whole room was winking and laughing in the orange glare as though even the old house itself partook in the general feeling of relief that Richard's escape from death had brought to World's-End.

"*Now* for our tea!" said Mary, and she whisked out, looking more than ever like a busy angel with the fleecy sleeves of her dressing-gown waving back in the energy of her movements.

All her life long Phoebe recalled that cup of scalding tea,—drunk as the grey dawn broke over World's-End on that day of deliverance,—as something nectarous, ambrosial, divinely uplifted above all other food that she had ever tasted or ever would taste. And she asked Mary to warm a little saucer of cream dashed with tea for Wizzy, to whom this beverage was a consolation for most of the ills of life.

She got up when Mary had gone, too restless to stay in the lonely bed which Owen had not shared with her now for two long, miserable weeks.

Wrapping her warm, fur-lined dressing gown about her she went to the window and looked out. She always slept with her shutters wide, as Owen liked them, and now she saw the pale scarf of the dawn floating above the dark horizon, beyond the winter twigs,—like a white signal waved by hope it seemed to her, and yet . . . and yet. . . . Oh, where was her resolution to tell him all just as soon as she knew whether Richard would live or die?—If only he had believed those cruel, true words. And as she stood there, big-eyed, forlorn, a little lonely waif of life, facing the full-breasted dawn,—she had something of the wondering pain at the course of things that must visit even the breast of a Japanese condemned by his own decree to self-slaughter.

The door opened as on that other day and Owen entered. He was very pale but the stony look had gone from his face. He came over to the window and stood beside her.

"He will live . . . " he said in a low voice.

Phoebe took his hand timidly,—then held it to her lips and heart, and he did not seek to stay her. She did not look at him, and he too was gazing at the quickening east. A red-bird streaked by like a flame springing from the ashen branches.

Owen was speaking again—to himself now. He was speaking his thoughts aloud, muttering indistinctly:

"It was those words . . ." he said, "those words. . . ."

Suddenly, in that cold, bleak dawn, standing there actually touching the one desire of her heart, little Phoebe was caught up on that mount of transfiguration whose stern splendour breaks, if only once, through the dark mists of most human lives.

She stepped back a little from him, and said in a small, faint voice:

"But . . . they were true words. . . . "

"Eh?" he said, like a man rising confused to the surface of his own thoughts.

"What . . . Richard said . . . that day . . . about me . . . was true. . . . "

There came a silence. She saw his hand go up over his eyes. Then he reached out his other hand behind him without turning, and drew her to him. He held her so tight against him that he hurt her, but this pain was beautiful. If he would only hold her tighter—tighter—until the crushed life stopped aching——

"You . . . you . . . didn't understand . . . " she faltered piteously. "Oh, put me from you! . . . It was true. I was his. . . . "

"Don't," he cried sharply. "There's no need . . . I've always known it . . . I knew it when I married you . . . and . . . I knew you would tell me . . . some day. . . . "

He caught her up to him in both arms now, and she felt his cheek pressed down upon her head, and the tightening of the muscles in his jaw as he set his teeth together. He caught her still closer. "Darling . . . darling . . . darling . . . " she heard him whispering.

At first she clung to him in a trance of amazed rapture,—then as the lightning stabs into the sea, a new, lurid pain struck down into the secret depths of her being. If he had always known—if he had known when he married her—then—it was out of pity that he had taken her—to save her—out of pity—pity——

She struggled free and stood staring before her like one witless.

"Oh, my darling,—my little heart,—what is it?" he asked anxiously, trying to take her in his arms again. But she put out one hand against his breast, and stood so with her stiffened arm holding him away from her.

"Then . . . it . . . it . . . was pity . . . " she stammered. "You . . . you . . . didn't . . . love me. . . . "

"Phoebe!" he cried. He tried a second time to draw her to him. But she held him off, saying:

"No . . . no. . . . Wait. . . . It was pity . . . all the time it was just . . . pity. . . . O my God!"

And flinging herself down she buried her face on her arms against the window-sill.

Now he had drawn her up into his arms again. His voice had a sort of tremulous anger in it.

"Phoebe! . . . Phoebe! . . . I loved you from the first minute I ever saw you . . . not as I do now . . . but dearly. Do you think I could have married you if I didn't love you?" He gave a sort of broken laugh, then rushed on vehemently. "The man doesn't live who could take to wife a woman he has no love for. There was pity too, yes,—an infinite compassion for a lovely nature wronged and hurt, but I believed in you. I always believed in you—I knew I had only to wait. I knew the truth there was in you—the courage. I knew that you would tell me. When I married you you were sick to death in spirit,—a poor little maimed thing; but you, the real you, *my* Phoebe,—you were there under it all. And for that I loved you, and believed in you, and waited for this precious hour. Oh, Phoebe! . . . little heart . . . don't say these cruel things to me. . . . "

But she went on feverishly with obstinate despair! "You only say it to comfort me . . . you're so kind . . . oh, let me go! . . . It was only pity . . . it was only pity. . . . It's only pity now."

He held her off and tried to look into her face, but she hung it down on her breast. He could see the great tears glittering down between them—a veritable rain of tears.

"Phoebe . . . " he said, his voice was very low and broke on the words here and there. "I've suffered so much these past days . . . are you really going to make me suffer more?"

"It was pity . . . it was pity . . . " she droned on, gulping her tears like a child that has given over hoping. "It was only pity . . . let me go . . . I will go back to father. . . . "

Then she heard a sound of such fierce, contained anguish that it startled her. It was the moan back of shut teeth which breaks from a man who is at the limit of his endurance. She glanced up through her blinding tears in terror, and seeing his face her terror increased tenfold. He had the sunken, gone look of one dying,—his face was all contorted. He tried to speak in answer to her look,—tried twice,—then suddenly broke into such sobbing as a woman may only hear once in her lifetime, and which when death comes she still seems to hear.—In an instant she had flung herself against him, over him as it were,

as though she would shield him from his terrible grief with her soft body. "Oh, my darling! Oh, my life! . . . My soul . . . my blood!" she cried. "Stop! . . . Stop! . . . I can't bear it. . . . No! No! I will not ever say it again. . . . Never, never again. Yes, you love me! I feel it! . . . Oh, I love you so! . . . Oh, I shall die if you don't stop . . . you are tearing me . . . you are tearing out my heart . . . these are not tears . . . they are blood . . . Owen! Owen! . . . "

He clutched her as the drowning clutch,—his face pressed between her breasts, and with her hands, her arms, her whole body she clung to him,—wreathed about him,—wound his head to her with desperate, savage tenderness. So they clung sobbing together, shaken as by one life.

The bright fire that Mary had kindled died down,—steps began to pass softly to and fro in the house. The red winter sun, burning softly through the ashen branches, wrapped them in a glowing web. Until they were quite spent they clung there in each other's arms, and Phoebe, under the veil of her thick hair, drank the tears from his face with passionate kisses . . . kissed and kissed that dear face that was more than God to her wild, wilful heart,—kissed it until she was so weary that she just left her lips against it in one long, exhausted caress of utter self-abandonment and love half-assuaged.

XLVII

EVERYONE went early to bed that evening at World's-End. It was as if they had seen the hem of death's sable garment trail from the threshold, and, double-locking the steadfast door of the still inviolate home upon him, had said with a deep, unanimous sigh of the spirit, "Ah, now, at last, we can sleep in safety."

Even the faithful Miss Carney was to seek slumber on this beneficent night, lying on the couch which Owen had occupied in Richard's dressing-room, with the door open and a night-light burning. Under the opiate given early in the evening her patient would be sure also to sleep tranquilly until morning. Mary took Sally off to bed at nine o'clock. At half-past nine Patton, yawning and stretch-

ing like a sluggish colossus coming drowsily to life, went off in search of the first unbroken rest that he had enjoyed since his arrival, two weeks ago. By ten the old clock was the one animated thing in all the slumber-muted house.

But by the side of Owen, now so dearly near her once again and fallen immediately into the deep, stirless sleep of exhaustion, Phoebe lay, wide awake, watching the soft shadows from the wood-fire play about the lovely room, that seemed once more to smile upon her with a friend's countenance. Was it possible . . . oh! was it possible,—that death and fear had gone, and only love was with her?—Might she not wake up suddenly to find that she had been dreaming, and in her dream had said,—"This is a dream"?

Cautiously,—little by little she turned her head on the pillow. No—not in dreams was a beloved face ever as clear and familiar as that dark face bent towards her in its sleep—the lips parted by deep, tranquil breaths,—the eyelids, still heavy from tears, sealing so calmly the tired eyes. And yet—dared she but touch him—just to reassure herself by yet another sense that he was really there—that this wonderful, great day of joy was not illusion, but glorious, golden reality. Just to put out her hand—light as a feather—and touch his cheek or hair. But then to run the risk of waking him after all that he had been through?—No,—she dared not. And yet—and yet—this hunger to touch him softly—a moth's wing touch,—the touch of a petal on a leaf——

As if in his sleep he felt the wistful, timid longing, he lifted one of his arms and let it drop across her slight body. And, pinioned there by the great arm which lay leaden with sleep upon her, she smiled happily, looking down at it from under her lowered lashes. More and more she smiled as a quaint fancy came to her. "Dryad," he called her sometimes.—Now his arm lay across her like the great branch of a tree. Her breast could hardly draw in breath under that warm weight—yet for a long time she lay there, happy to be stifled by what was so dear to her. And all Phoebe's nature spoke in that happiness. To love, to be loved,—even to be hurt by what she loved,—this she counted living, and the rest was but shadows to her.

But presently the fire, flaring up joyous and golden,

as though it, too, were waking from happy dreams,—roused him with the shaking of its bright flag across his face, and, turning a little towards her, he withdrew his arm and felt for her hand, kissing it in his sleep and then keeping it in his own against his cheek.

Raising herself on her free arm, Phoebe gazed down at him in that fluctuant golden light that was like the actual glow from the wings of happiness. She pored upon him with parted lips and breath in-held, as Psyche might have pored upon sleeping Eros, returned to her, this time with his torch alight by his own will. Gone were fear and darkness,—gone was doubt,—she looked on the face of love clear of every shadow; in the quiet heart of the kindly night,—there close to him, still cherished and desired by him, knowing all,—like lover and mother in one, she gazed down on him, made helpless by sleep like a little child,—at the mercy of even a weak hand like her own, had it been the hand of hate instead of the hand of love. Dearest and best and greatest-hearted of all the world,—and he was hers as she was his. . . . And as she leaned there in awed, tender security,—suddenly, as it had been a rose-lit slide, the present was withdrawn, and she gazed back into the steep, dark caverns of the past through which with so much fear and so much trembling she had climbed to this wide place of refuge. She looked bravely, not shrinking, and saw herself as she had been when first Owen and then that other came into her life,—a self-willed, self-centred girl,—full of a wild, imperious desire for life and love,—not rightly knowing and certainly not caring over-much in what real life and love consisted. But now she knew, if only in part, something of these benign yet awful mysteries; and the new spirit in her shuddered with a sort of pity for what she had then been;—for the blindness and littleness and narrow passion of it all.

And she sent her thought deeper still, and drew forth the thing that might have been from those dark shadows of the past. She forced her mind to see herself as Richard's unwanted wife,—a creature for all time abased in his sight and in her own,—her child cast off. . . .

Recoiling from this dread picture, another as terrible confronted her, and she saw herself again, lying there alone on the mountainside, dead by her own hand,—lying there for days, perhaps, until . . .

Vividly there rushed before her the scene of her old

father's grief and despair as it might have been when he was told of what had been found on the mountain. . . . She dropped her head on her arms and trembled with a sick horror of the self that had been hers.

For some moments she stayed thus, then again she lifted herself and gazed down at the face of the man sleeping so quietly at her side. Ah, was it strange that she worshipped him? Was she not his creation? Had he not given her a soul? If she had worshipped him before she knew, would not God Himself forgive her for worshipping him now?

In her impassioned young gratitude she felt a helpless anger against the shortness of life. How was she to grow worthy of him in such a meagre space of time? How fulfil that burning ideal of herself that should be—make herself all glorious within like the king's daughter, as she had once told him that she would do?

And again the present was withdrawn; but now it was at the future that she gazed,—at the image of herself as she longed to be, moving through a clear shining towards the summits of spiritual attainment. Yes,—no purity would be stronger than her purity, for it would be the fruit of choice and not of chance; no compassion would be deeper than hers,—because it would be born of understanding; no unselfishness greater, for her true, her real self had been given her by the selfless love of another, and must be cherished only to spend itself in things apart from self,—thus growing in greatness by what it gave away, in accordance with divine paradox.

Ah, the little children that she would succor. . . . Her heart swelled as she thought of her own baby and remembered what had been almost her chief agony,—the seeing him so tender with what she had thought that he believed his own while she looked on in guilty silence. And her heart seemed to blush hot within her at this memory.

Yet all the time he had known,—he had forgiven;—he had forgiven because he understood,—not standing aloof from her in condescending self-righteousness,—but drawing her to his side in that wonderful comprehension that saw the true spirit in her through that dark veil of her mistaken youth.

Ah, the young girls mistaken as she had been mistaken,—caught blind and wilful and reckless in the bright snare

of romance and springtime passion,—how tender and loving she would be to them,—how comprehending,—even as he had been to her. And ever she would climb up and up towards those clear peaks that rose so gentle and full of a mysterious promise above the mists and shadows of the world in which till now she had been used to move. What did the great words say? That evil might exercise a stirring power . . . point out the path to goodness . . . to the inner advance of life . . . to the formation of a new nature. . . . Yes, a new nature,—a new life,—a new world—all these she would win,—because of him and of the soul that he had given her. . . .

A great emotion lifted her spirit as on a rushing wind. For one immortal moment more than love possessed it,—the wild gratitude of love for love,—the outgush of all the spirit towards some vast, benevolent source, as it were a winging home to the Heart of the universe, to give unspeakable thanks. For that moment of wild, purified ecstasy the pagan slipped from Phoebe's soul like a frail husk,—she was rapt into unimaginable heights, and all her being quivered upward like a thin, passionate flame towards its Source.

The next morning, shortly after breakfast, Owen and Patton went for a long walk together.

Patton was to leave World's-End by the afternoon train, and there was a very serious and important point that Owen wished to discuss with him.

The day was cold and glittering. From a sky of light, bright blue a small sun glared intensely, as though brought to a focus by the great burning-glass of the sky. The grey woods clung like smoke to the mountainsides, and like smoke clustered in the folds of the valley. The little Green-Flower lay like a torpid, silver-backed python vainly trying to thaw itself in the winter sunlight. Here and there some fields had put on the livery of spring with the emerald plush of winter-oats. There was a great antiphonal in progress among the crows—two flights answering each other, one from the hollow near the oat-field,—one from Logan's Wood.

Patton was smoking his briar as he walked, but Owen, who preferred a tranquil, sedentary pipe after meals, had already finished his before leaving World's-End, and now walked with his hands loosely caught behind him, looking

up from under his brows at the mountains they were approaching.

In their stupendous tranquillity they seemed like a great "Credo" rising towards the suspended abyss of ether,—the earth's "will to believe" made manifest. Something in him responded to their silent and immemorial assertion of an all-seeing Unseen, as with a great shout of the spirit only spiritually to be heard. With bare majesty the venerable words strode through his mind:

"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. . . ."

The theology of the great Hebrew book might be anthropomorphic, but when it spoke with the voice of its poets it spoke as with divinity's own voice.

Another trumpeting of words, mysteriously great and potent, sounded its inner réveillé:

"The heart that abandons itself to the supreme mind finds itself in relation to all its works, and will travel a royal road to particular knowledges and powers. . . ."

There came to him a quickening of all his spirit, akin to the ecstatic motion which had drawn Phoebe from her grosser sheath the night before,—but with him it was a force of more sobriety,—an answering to the vast whole with, "I agree and I revere,"—an abandonment in full consciousness of all the self to what is selfless, yet transcends individuality, to the supreme paradox whose core is truth.

Patton walked in silence beside him, feeling that together they touched the garment of a great moment and that virtue went from it to them both.

As they entered the first field leading to the flank of the mountain, Owen turned to him.

"Charles," he said, "I want your advice on a very grave question. Now that Richard is out of danger,—there comes the question of——" he hesitated, then went on firmly, "of my attitude to him and to Sally."

"Yes—I've been thinking of that," said Patton.

"He is certainly out of danger?"

"It will be a long time before he gets his strength, but practically he is out of danger."

Owen hesitated again and grew white.

"That arm . . . ?" he said.

Patton looked grim. It was the look that came on his face when he had an operation to perform in a case that

could only be locally anæsthetized. "I can't tell you yet, old man. It may be stiff—he may pull through."

They walked in silence for some moments.

Then Owen said, a hoarseness in his voice:

"What I want to ask you is about telling Sally . . . the truth."

"I see," said Patton. He pulled hard at his pipe without noticing that it had gone out.

There was another silence.

"Will he . . . remember clearly, Charles?"

"Not clearly, I think. But. . . ."

He, too, hesitated.

"You see," said Owen in an even tone, "the first blow only dazed him. He—he looked at me. . . ."

"He'll remember essentials," said Patton stolidly.

"I thought that."

Silence fell again.

Suddenly Patton said rather gruffly:

"I wouldn't go over it, old man. What's the use?"

"No use, Charles. At first I didn't care one way or the other. Then I went down . . . there are depths, you know. . . ."

Acute pain twisted Patton's face for a moment, then he said quietly:

"Yes,—I know."

It was he who again broke the silence.

"See here, old man. I think I've got the gist of what you want to ask me. Shall I put it for you?"

"Thanks—yes," said Owen.

"I've hammered at it a good bit in my own mind. When Richard is strong enough the chances are that he'll tell his mother the truth. I say chances,—for he *may* . . ." (Patton's italics here were very expressive of his opinion of Richard) . . . "he *may*,—out of consideration for her health,—decide not to speak. You know him better than I do. What do you think?"

"I've gone over that," answered Owen, "and I think that, while he will shrink from telling her, the—the circumstances are such that he will feel compelled to."

"Ah,—that settles matters, then."

"How do you mean?"

"I think it will be better for you to tell her yourself. If he blurts it out to her like that . . . lying there. . . ."

His broken sentences were more expressive than words could have been.

Owen's teeth caught his under-lip and held it.

Presently he said in a low voice:

"You don't think this second shock will be too much for her?"

"It won't be good for her, of course. But it will be better than the other way. Sally is much better than she was last winter. I doubt if she could have weathered these past two weeks then."

"Shall I tell her today—while you are here?"

Patton thought hard for a few moments.

"Better wait a while," he said at last. "The boy won't be able to talk coherently for some days. You see, she had one violent shock last night. It was a shock of joy, true—but it got in its work just the same. I shall have to keep Richard under opiates for at least a week more. Suppose we wait until I come tomorrow to settle the time?"

"Just as you think, of course," said Owen slowly.

Patton stole a glance full of shy affection at the dark, preoccupied face. Then he suddenly hooked his arm in the other's.

"I say, Owen," he mumbled. "I'd knock these memories higher than a kite if I were you."

Owen smiled. It was a very sad, sane smile.

"Cockle-burrs are a better simile for memories than kites, Charles," he said.

"Then I'm dashed if I wouldn't chuck cockle-burrs, coat and all, into the fire," retorted Patton grimly.

"You forget my mind's the coat in this case."

Patton was silent. The words "physician, heal thyself," occurred to him. Who knew better than he did that memories are not subject to the will of man?—Who knew better than he. . . . A rigour ran through him. He withdrew his arm and busied himself with refilling his pipe. His hands were shaking.

They had reached a fence, beyond which rose a grove of noble oaks and chestnuts. Through their trunks could be seen an old brick wall, violet-brown with age and thickly crusted with moss and lichen.

"The old Randolph burial-ground—hey?" asked Patton, glad for even this lugubrious change of subject.

"Yes. Shall we take a look? The key is here under a

flat stone—a queer old custom that I've never changed."

"Yes, let's," said Patton. "It's a beautiful spot. See how those wild grapevines have grown from tree to tree, making them look like one huge banyan. . . . And the valley there at its feet . . . and the mountain keeping guard. They should sleep sound, those old Randolphs."

"Yes. I love the place," said Owen.

He found the big, rusty key and opened the old iron gate between its brick posts, surmounted by balls of stone, from each of which rose a dexter hand holding a tomahawk.

Owen pointed to them with the key. "The old explorer's crest, invented by himself, before the discovery of the famous nag's-head," he said, smiling.

"Fine old fellow," said Patton heartily. "Is he buried here?"

"Yes. There he is. He was the third Owen Randolph, you know. He built the central part of the house that's now standing."

Patton turned about on the thick carpet of periwinkle that ran from high wall to wall of an enclosure about eighty feet square. The tombstones were all very simple, of white marble beautifully toned by age and weather. On this one which stood slightly apart, with one other, from the rest was carved:

My Father

OWEN RANDOLPH

Born Jan. 15—1715
Died Nov. 9—1795

Ingenium nemo sine corpore exercebat; optimus quisque facere quam dicere, sua ab aliis bene facta laudare, quam ipse aliorum narrare malebat.

"A fine old chap . . . a fine old chap . . ." murmured Patton again, reading over the stately Latin words. "Did he choose that reticent epitaph himself, do you know?—It would be like what I've read of him."

"Yes, it would be like him, but it was more like him not to choose any, I think. He even stated in his will that he didn't wish any laudatory words put on his grave-

stone, and so his son got round it rather well, I think, by quoting that bit from Sallust. It agrees so exactly with the father's views on the subject—'each best man preferred to do rather than to say.' "

"It's the old statesman in a nutshell," said Patton musingly. "Fine stock you come from, old man."

Owen stood also musing on the simple headstone.

"They say I hark back to that Owen," he said at last. "He was a man of enormous strength and violent passions."

"Yes, so I've heard—so I've heard," said Patton hastily. "Could tear a double 'deck' of cards in two, I believe, and tie a poker round his neck like a cravat."

"So tradition says."

"Member of the House of Burgesses, Councillor of State, —Commissioner for boundary lines, treaties with Indians,—explorer,—patriot,—what didn't the old fellow do?—You'll have to look lively to keep up with him, Owen."

Owen shook his head.

"I'm afraid he'd disinherit me if he had the power," he said. "Whatever he was, I'm sure he wasn't socialistic in tendency."

"But you're not an out and out socialist, old man."

"I can't buckle on any fixed creed and work in it, Charles. You might call me a question-asker. I try to ask practically. I'm not content with answers in the air. But I've never yet found a solution,—neither mine nor other men's,—that I could accept *in toto*. In the meantime . . ."

"You 'do your damnedest—angels could do no more,' " put in Patton quickly, and they both stifled a laugh out of respect for the quiet sanctity of the place where men and women lay resting after the long day.

As they turned to go Patton said:

"I hope you'll have a son some day to carry on the old name."

"I hope so," said Owen quietly.

They struck through a field to the left, and, entering the woods, began to climb the mountain.

"That's a lovely child you've married, Owen," said Patton presently. "She's going to make a splendid woman. You must cosset her up a bit now, though. We neglected her rather badly during all this turmoil. I've

an idea she doesn't feel quite as strong as she pretends to."

He gave one of his shrewd, sidelong glances at Owen, but the dark face was quite unconscious. "Doesn't know yet," thought Patton. "Just as well, too. Might get to worrying badly over what all this might mean to her."

So Mary had been right, after all.

The chief memory that Richard brought out of the dark undertow of death was the memory of a gigantic Face that reached from the heavens to the uttermost depths of that sea in which he seemed alternately to drown or with agony to float upward. And whether he sank, smothering, or floated racked by the tossing of angry waves which seemed to be jerking his bones asunder,—always that vast Face, turgid with annihilating wrath, glared at him. Power, evil and irresistible, had taken to itself a shape and poured destruction on him from those dreadful eye-sockets and drawn-back swollen lips. It was the Face of wrath, of vengeance, of ruthlessness—the stark visage of murder filling earth and sky—and its likeness was that of a face that he had once known only gentle and benevolent. . . .

And it seemed to him that this huge Face,—so implacable with the lurid lighting of eyes that thirsted for revenge,—was the persona through which sounded the voice of the universe. Those snarled-back lips were the grim curtains of a gateway into which he would be eventually sucked and ground to pulp between great fangs, jagged and preposterous as mountains—a serried range of teeth, arming those hot jaws that slavered with the lust of devouring.

It was against this face that he struggled and shrieked, in such moments as the opiates relaxed their hold on him, and when the strong tentacles of morphia wrapt him again, holding him numb and heavy in those black depths it was at this face, glaring down at him as through miles of sullen water, that he moaned and muttered feebly.

Even after he regained his senses and began slowly, so slowly, to mend,—this face, remembered, was a torture. And lying there, transfixed by weakness and the heavy plaster, in which his right arm was still set, he would strive pitifully by the hour to recall exactly what had happened,—to put into some sequence the events which

had preceded his illness. What had he said?—He could not recall the words.—They had been in the rose garden,—the snow was very smooth and deep,—she had stared at him with helpless rage as one impaled might stare at the executioner.—Yes, that was the way it had begun.—But afterwards? Only the memory of that kind face made hideous by fury would come to him,—of that face and the lifted stick.

And how much did his mother know?—Did they all know?—Had *she* told everything by now?—How long ago had it all happened? What was to come next?——

One day, when he could bear it no longer he lay gathering his scattered forces for a long time, then just managed to articulate:

"Mother. . . ."

She was on her knees by him in a second, her face close to his.

"My precious boy . . . don't exert yourself. I'm here. . . . I'm always here. . . ."

He looked down at his bandaged arm in the cast, heavy as stone.

"How? . . ." he whispered.

"It was that cursed horse . . . 'Ironmonger,' the vicious colt. Don't think about it, my darling!—Charles Patton says you will be quite, quite well again. As well and strong as ever, my darling—my own precious boy."

Richard smiled weakly at her, and let his eyes close.

So that was what they had said!——

He was too weak to follow it out. He fell shortly into a thick sleep.

A week later Hannah brought a little note to Sally from Owen, as during one of Richard's heavy, still drugged sleeps she was taking a few moments to comb out her hair, now almost entirely grey. This startled her a little. Things startled her very easily nowadays. The colour settled on her cheek bones as she read:

"Dear Sally: I write because I want to make sure that you will come at once, and not think this only an ordinary message. Patton is with me, and I wish very much to consult you about something.

"Owen."

"Where is he?" she said, scrutinising the little dark face to find whether Hannah were in the secret. But

Hannah knew nothing, and her face was serene and unconscious, though it looked grave, as all faces did during that time at World's-End.

"He an' the doctor's in the steddy, Miss Sally," she said. "Mr. Owen said he'd like to see you right away, please, while Mr. Richard's asleep."

Sally went slowly downstairs to Owen's study, cogitating deeply all the way. Her heart had begun to beat quickly. Could it,—might it be . . . something about that dark secret that hung over her always? . . .

She entered and, still holding the knob of the study door in her hand, looked steadily at the two men who were standing before the fire.

Owen came forward and, taking her hand, gently led her to a chair.

"Well?" said Sally drily, looking from one to the other of them. "This is rather like being brought before the *Vehmgericht*. . . ."

Patton came to the rescue.

"The fact is, Sally," he said, "Owen has something that he feels he must tell you. There's nothing whatever in it to alarm you, but it will probably upset you a good deal. I want you to take this if your heart begins thumping." He pushed a little glass towards her. "I shall go into the library until you and Owen have finished."

He got up without more ado and left the room.

Sally had grown very pale. Her thin hands were locked hard together upon her knee. Suddenly the greyness of her thick hair framing her dark, sallow face struck Owen as terribly pathetic. It was as if she were crowned with the ashes of her burnt-out life.

He came and stood near her, looking down at her. His lip quivered.

"Sally," he said at last, "we've been awfully fond of each other. . . ."

"Why do you say 'we have been'?" she broke in sharply, her figure rigid, her heart taking a still quicker rhythm. "What is it, Owen?—For God's sake let me have it quick. . . ."

He grew so white that she got up and stood close to him, putting her hand on his shoulder.

"Is it about Richard?"

"Yes."

She took her hand from his shoulder and put it to her heart.

"And . . . and . . . you?"

"Yes, Sally."

"And . . ."

He spoke in a firmer tone, forcing himself to meet her eyes.

"It's about us all, Sally. You,—me,—Richard . . ." He paused. ". . . Phoebe," he ended almost inaudibly.

Sally dropped back into her chair as if from a blow, and covered her face with her thin, twitching hands.

She heard Owen's voice saying:

"Take this . . . there's worse to come," and felt the touch of the wine glass against her hand. Still keeping one hand against her cheek, she drank the medicine mechanically.

". . . Worse?" she then whispered with that little croak that intense emotion brought to her voice.

"Much worse, my poor girl. . . . I want to tell you . . . I must tell you . . . Sally,—'Ironmonger' didn't savage Richard. He wasn't hurt by a horse. . . . He . . ."

He turned with his back to her, staring into the fire. He did not choose to see her face, nor that she should see his in that moment.

"It was I—who did it," he said very low, but distinctly.

She did not stir or utter a sound.

He went on without looking round.

"I've always known," he said. "I mean about Richard and"—he paused again—"and . . . Phoebe."

Still she did not stir nor speak. He went on:

"He said some vile words to her. I went mad. . . . I had father's ash in my hand. . . ."

He stopped, and the silence seemed muffled and roaring as when one's hands are over one's ears.

Then at last she spoke.

"I knew it," she said in a deathly voice. "I knew . . . it . . . would . . . come. O God!" She screamed on the word suddenly, as when Patton had told her that Richard would live. "My brother! . . . my son! . . ."

Patton wrenched open the door and dashed to her. He took her bodily in his arms and laid her upon the leather lounge.

"Go . . ." he said under his breath to Owen. "Go away . . . quick! . . ."

Owen went out and straight to his own bedroom. He locked the door and, sinking into a chair by the bed, hid his face in his arms against the pillow.

It was not until the middle of February that Richard was strong enough to be moved. He passionately desired to get away from World's-End, and Patton thought it the best thing for him.

They had decided to take him to a piney seacoast in Georgia, and Patton and Mary were to accompany them on the journey, Mary staying on to be with Sally. Miss Carney was also to be kept on until Richard was quite strong again.

Two days before they left Owen came to the door of Sally's room.

"Come in, Owen," she said, recognising his knock.

He entered and went towards her hesitatingly, but she came to meet him. She had been very ill after that second terrible blow, and her face had the greyish look that seems like a fine dust fallen from Death's wings in passing. She came right up to him and put her hands on his shoulders. Her great eyes were inscrutable and unfathomably sad.

"After all . . ." she said, ". . . my brother. . . ."

Owen's face began to twitch. He hid it on her thin shoulder. She put her hand up to it. He could feel her rings cold through his hair.

"The bitterness of death, . . ." he heard her whisper, "is past."

They sat silent for a long time, close together, gazing into the fire, hand in hand as when they had been children.

Then Owen stirred, and, taking a legal paper from his breast, laid it upon her knee.

"What is it?" she asked, recoiling.

"For Richard," he said gently.

"For . . .?"

She took up the paper and turned it curiously in her hands.

"What is it?" she asked again.

"My will, Sally."

"You . . . you . . .?"

"I have left him the estate in Florida and some property on Broadway."

"You have . . . You . . . ?"

She could not articulate. Suddenly she who never wept leaned down across his knees and cried as if her poor, sick heart would break.

Perhaps the most insupportable moment of Richard's life was that in which his mother put the copy of his uncle's will upon the counterpane and told him of its contents. One harsh exclamation broke from him, a dark flush bathed his face—then he turned it away, and even her tender coaxing could not win a word from him for hours.

On the eve of their departure from World's-End,—about midnight,—Giles, who was a very light sleeper, was roused by the gleam of a shaded candle in the nursery. Thinking that it was Phoebe come to ask her help about something, she raised herself on her elbow behind the bed-curtains, preparatory to getting up. Then, rather indignant and a little alarmed, she kept quite still, watchful,—ready to pounce at the least sign of anything unusual. For it was not Phoebe who stood there by the baby's crib with that shaded candle, but the grim, dark lady with the bony hands and hard black eyes that Giles "couldn't abide." Her long dressing-gown of violet velvet hung on her emaciated body and trailed out behind her like a pall. She looked "as I'm a Christian for all the world like a dismal coffin stood on its end," Giles told Hannah the next day. "It was like some grisly visitation to see her a-standin' there in the bowels o' the night, creep-mousin' them graveyardish eyes o' hern over the blessed lamb, an' her that innocent a-slumberin' on as though a angel of the Lord was come to kiss her."——

Giles could not tell how long that solemn, ominous figure stood there; she had no watch by her,—but when it finally withdrew her arm was all "pins and needles," she told Hannah.

Deep, deep in her heart, as on a sensitive film, Sally was fixing the face of her sleeping grandchild. She knew that she might never see it again, though they had assured her that with care she might live for many years. Still. . . .

Shading the flame with her thin fingers, in which the bones showed painfully through the flesh thus made rose-gold and transparent, she bent over and kissed the little

face. The baby screwed all her wee features into a bunch of protest, and vigorously with the back of one hand she scrubbed her mouth and budlike nose, as though a cobweb had suddenly blown across them. Then, with a smiling sigh and stretch that arched her whole little body from head to feet,—sucking comfortably her own lower lip,—she sank again into her fragrant sleep.

Giles, on whom in her uncovered state a draught had been playing, here sneezed so violently that her head bobbed downward. When she looked up the tall, violet-shrouded figure was gone.

When Sally reached her own room again she in her turn was startled by a figure that stood near her fire and turned to meet her;—a figure with half-scared, yet very brave, dilated eyes, and a long rope of sorrel-gold hanging across one shoulder.

"Cousin Sally," said Phoebe in that muted voice of hers, "I . . . I . . . couldn't bear to say 'good-bye' before the others. I . . . I . . . want to thank you. . . ."

"To thank me, child?" broke in Sally, with a fierce sound that was half mirth, half misery. "You have little to thank me for, I must say."

"You . . . you . . . were kind to me . . . once . . ." murmured Phoebe," her voice shaken by the beating of her heart.

Suddenly Sally's face relaxed.

"We have all suffered," she said.

A silence fell.

"Would you . . . would you like to see the baby . . . alone?" ventured Phoebe, almost whispering.

"Thank you. I have just seen her."

"Then . . . good-bye, Cousin Sally. I . . . I am sorry for all that . . . that's come on you . . . through me."

"There was blame on both sides," said Sally firmly.

"Could you . . ." Phoebe began, trembling all over. "Could you . . . forgive us . . . me and . . . my baby?" she said, her teeth chattering.

Sally shrugged the heavy violet garment fom her gaunt shoulders with a dexterous movement. With her deft, nervous hands, almost in the same movement, she threw it about Phoebe.

"There . . . you were catching cold," she said. "Good night. There is a great deal that we can all forgive one another. Good night. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Cousin Sally," whispered the girl. She half lifted her hand. Sally visibly hesitated, then took it loosely in her hard fingers.

"Good-bye," she said again. She let a sort of grim smile lift the corner of her lip. "I may get more cordial as I grow older," she said. "I was never a gushing person, you know."

"No," said Phoebe gently. "Then . . . good-bye."

Once more Sally said good-bye. She watched the slight young figure with the rope of gold that seemed biting into the dark velvet like a fire pass out and turn to the left along the corridor. Then she shut the door quietly. Taking off her small enamelled watch, she began winding it for the night, looking coldly and steadily into the fire as she did so.

The next morning, when the time drew near for Richard and Sally to leave World's-End, Owen took Phoebe in his arms and told her to walk towards Logan's Wood, and that, as soon as the carriage had driven off, he would catch her up. She obeyed him silently.

When she reached the high field at the wood's edge she sat down on a felled log to wait for him.

To her left lay World's-End in its smoke of winter trees. Above them the real smoke from its dark red chimneys spiralled softly, dimly blue into the clear air. To her right the foothills went tumbling like gay, blue-clad hoydens to the distant valley, and beyond them rose the mountains, stern, austere, like patriarchs coldly watching the antics of an undignified generation. "Why hop ye so, ye little hills?" they seemed asking from under beetling brows.

And below, straight away on every side, the broad valley heaved softly to the sea. As on that terrible day, just before the New Year, snow wrapped the quiet earth. White and blue, as though dedicated to the Virgin, was the lovely day.

Then Phoebe's heart checked. She put up her hands to it and her eyes grew black.

A carriage had emerged from the gateway of the southern lawn. It went at a slow, steady trot along the road towards Crewe. Strange and out of place it looked in the spotless landscape, slowly moving like some great beetle numbed with cold crawling along the soft ermine of the snow.

And yet in that small black, glistening box so quaintly

mounted on its orange wheels,—Nemesis herself was being borne away, her dark wings crumpled, her bow broken, her shafts unfeathered.

As in a strange white dream, on which this one blot had fallen from some ink-well of the recording gods,—Phoebe, hand on heart, watched the black shining patch slowly, steadily receding over the snowy fields.

And now Owen's voice spoke close beside her. She started to her name and sprang up. He took her hand in his, and thus, hand in hand, they both stood watching that beetle-like shape that grew ever smaller and smaller as it went from them across the valley.

Suddenly, high overhead, a buzzard came slanting down some upper strata of the wind. Below him his dark shadow glided over the dazzling snow. He tacked, flying in the direction of the carriage. And these three dark objects, one high in air,—one tracking the pure snow,—one stealing over it yet leaving no stain behind,—all went from them towards the far horizon line.

Then the carriage disappeared into the "flat-woods,"—the buzzard wheeled and dropped, his shadow vanishing with him. All was white and immaculate again.

She turned and faced Owen with a tremulous, wondering smile. He held out his arms to her. Suddenly she quivered, straightened as she had done that night at Gaunt's Hill. Her hand went to her side. But now there was no terror in her eyes,—only the bright, wild look of a nesting-bird.

"What is it? . . . What is it, my darling?" he asked as he had asked then.

"Owen . . . Owen . . ." she stammered, her breath inheld.

He took her in his arms. "What is it, my dear . . . my winsome?" he asked again.

She laid her cheek against his breast, holding him to her closer, closer, with both arms. He could just hear the soft whisper:

"Oh, if I could give you a son!"

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